

# Changes

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## Changes by NemiMontoya

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**Summary:**

When Richie comes to school with a new look and suddenly becomes a lot more popular, a worried Eddie realizes that his feelings for his best friend are not what he thought they were.

# 1. Sharp Dressed Man

## Author's Note:

I usually stick with the short-and-sweet one shot fics, but I wanted to see if I could write something longer for a change. I had planned to wait until the whole thing was finished before posting, but changed my mind. Hearing what you guys think could be good motivation. Thank you all for the great response I've gotten for my fics, and I hope you'll like this one. It probably won't be super long, I haven't planned out how many chapters I will have. For now, I'm just having fun and making things up as I go. Thanks for reading!

*They come runnin' just as fast as they can  
'Cause every girl crazy 'bout a sharp dressed man*

(ZZ Top - Sharp Dressed Man)

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"Have you guys seen Richie?" Eddie asks Stan and Bill as he takes his books out of his locker. "He should be annoying me by now."

"N-n-no, haven't seen him," Bill replies.

"Here comes Bev, maybe she's seen him," Stan says. Eddie turns to look at Bev, weaving past people in the hallway towards them.

"Have you guys seen Richie yet?" she asks, a wide smile on her face.

"I was just about to ask you," Eddie replies. "Why? What's he done now?"

"Just wait," Bev said, smile widening.

And then Eddie spots Richie in the hallway crowd, coming towards them with a sunny grin on his face, but it takes a second for his mind

to register that it is Richie, because he looks... different. He's not wearing his glasses, his hair looks even wilder than normal, and he has a new Ramones-style black leather jacket, worn with an Anthrax t-shirt, distressed dark jeans and new black boots. So few changes, and yet... he looks so different. He looks good.

"N-n-not bad, T-tozier," Bill chuckles as Richie comes up to them.

"Why, thank you, master William," Richie says in his British voice. "I do believe I don't look too shabby, even if I do say so myself."

"What happened to your glasses?" Stan asks, looking Richie up and down.

"Dude," Richie says excitedly, "my old man won a shitload of money on poker. He was in a good mood, and feeling unusually generous and offered to pay for new glasses, finally. I took the chance to see if I could talk him into getting me contacts instead, and he said okay."

Eddie smiles. Richie always hated those glasses. He looks relieved to be rid of them.

"And what about the jacket?" he asks.

"Like it?" Richie grins, preening. "Pops gave even gave me some dough for new clothes, so I thought I'd go for something different."

"Doesn't it look awesome?" Bev says. "I helped him pick it out."

Eddie's eyes turn to her.

"You did?"

"Yeah," Richie nods. "I asked her to help me with my new look, and she found this jacket in the thrift store. The boots too, both as good as new. Looks great, right?"

Eddie's feels his smile stiffen.

*"He asked Bev for help instead of me?"*

"Eds?"

Eddie looks up, meeting Richie's eyes, now no longer hidden behind those Coke-bottle lenses.

"Huh?"

"What do you think?"

"Oh, uhm... yeah, you look good, I guess... but with you, anything's an improvement," he adds sourly, then mentally kicks himself for not coming up with a better insult. But Richie seems to appreciate it, as he breaks into loud laughter.

"I was kidding," Eddie relents. "You look fine, Richie."

Richie gives him a warm, pleased smile. Eddie looks down, fidgeting with his books.

"Well, I gotta go find Ben and Mike," Bev says with a wave. "I'll see you guys at lunch."

"See you, thanks again," Richie calls after her, then throws an arm around Eddie's shoulder. "Alright, Eddie Spaghetti, unfortunately we'd better get to class."

Eddie shrugs his arm off.

"Then hurry up! And don't call me Eddie Spaghetti!"

They say bye to Stan and Bill and walk down the hall together, heading for their classroom. As they pass Mary Graham, one of the more popular girls in their year, her eyes fix on Richie.

"Hi, Richie," she says, smiling shyly.

"Good morning, milady!" he says with a flourished bow, then hurries to catch up with Eddie.

"See, Eds? It's the jacket. Chicks dig a guy in a black leather jacket."

Apparently so, because all day long, Eddie notices how girls turn their heads, how they whisper and giggle when Richie walks by. And it's getting on his nerves. Once, as he exits the bathroom he finds

Richie, who's waiting for him, surrounded by a group of girls, giggling shrilly at his jokes.

"That's so *funny*!" one of them says, tossing her hair. Eddie's mouth forms a stiff line, and he can feel his annoyance forming a hard, cold pit in his stomach.

"Come on, dumbass. Let's go get lunch, I'm hungry," he hisses impatiently.

"Why don't you go on ahead," the hair-tosser says, looping her arm around Richie's, and giving Eddie an insincere, dismissive smile. "We thought Richie could join us for lunch today."

Grinding his teeth, Eddie is about to storm off, when Richie pulls free from the girl's grip.

"Sorry m'am, no can do. I always sit with Eddie and the rest of my fellow bandits. But y'all have a nice day, now, ladies." Then he tips an imaginary cowboy hat, slings an arm around Eddie's shoulder and steers him away in the direction of the cafeteria. Eddie can't resist looking back at the girls with a gleeful smirk, and sees with no small satisfaction that they're practically fuming.

In the cafeteria, Eddie finds Mike and Ben already sitting at their usual table in the corner by the windows, and hurries over. His mom, of course, doesn't trust the cafeteria food and packs packs a lunch for him every day. Richie usually just brings a sandwich. They've gotten the habit of cutting Richie's sandwich in half and share it along with Eddie's lunch, and Eddie always brings an extra apple for Richie.

Sitting down next to Mike, he notices Richie is no longer at his side. Looking around, he sees Richie standing near the doors, chatting with Bev. He's smiling as he leans closer to her to listen to something she's saying, and Eddie feels that pit in his stomach again.

*"Isn't it enough for her that she's had Bill and Ben eating from the palm of her hand, she has to have Richie, too?"* he thinks bitterly, then looks down in shame. Why did he like think that, all of a sudden? He, himself, adores Bev as much as the rest of them. Of course he does, she's awesome. It's just... Bev and Richie seem closer. They don't

normally hang out just the two of them without the other Losers, and now all of a sudden she's given him a damn makeover. But Bev is interested in fashion, Eddie knows that. Of course Richie asked her for advice. And... maybe Richie does have a crush on her. What's wrong with that?

Eddie pulls out his lunch, avoiding looking at Richie as he and Bev approach the table along with Stan and Bill, who have joined them. For a second, Eddie thinks Richie might sit next to Bev, but he takes his usual seat next to Eddie, and Bev sits next to Ben.

As Eddie and Richie start dividing up their food, Richie peers at Eddie with a worried frown.

"You okay, Eds? You look pale. You don't have a fever, do you?"

He tries to feel Eddie's forehead, but Eddie swats his hand away.

"I'm fine! I already have my mom treating me like glass, I don't need you to do the same," he snaps.

"Hey, you don't have to tell me you're a badass fucker, but you really don't look so good," Richie says calmly.

"Sorry. I'm fine, it's just a slight headache." And that's true. Eddie can feel a throbbing pain inside his skull.

"So, take some aspirin."

"Don't have any, I forgot I was out and didn't refill."

"Fear not!" Richie says, digging through his backpack, and pulls out a bottle of aspirin. "I have some for emergencies."

Eddie takes it with a grateful smile. Winking at him, Richie grabs his apple and takes an enormous bite.

"Hey, Eds, why don't we hang out later, huh? Just the two of us?"

"Say it, don't spray it, asswipe!" Eddie says he narrowly avoids being splattered with apple juice. "I don't know. My mom was in a mood this morning, and she's probably going to insist on sending me off to

bed early. And... I really am kinda tired.”

”Tomorrow, then?”

Eddie looks up at Richie, smiling at him hopefully. His eyes are so warm, and Eddie is so unused to seeing them without glasses in the way that he finds himself looking down at the table, heart beating a little faster.

”Okay. Tomorrow’s good.”

\*

His mom really does send him off to bed early, and because Eddie’s headache refused to go away even with the aspirin, Eddie doesn’t fight her on it. He has an overwhelming urge to feel sorry for himself, and stretches out on his bed under a blanket with a miserable sigh.

He finds himself wishing that Richie still wore his glasses, still wore the same old clothes, though he feels bad for thinking it. Richie has always hated his glasses, hated the thick lenses, and the glasses have been broken many times (mostly by Henry Bowers) which Richie’s parents would yell at *Richie* for. Richie has always wanted contacts. And Richie rarely got anything from his parents, so getting the clothes as well as the contacts must mean a lot to him. But it’s not really the changes in Richie’s appearance that’s bothering Eddie.

It’s the thought of losing Richie.

Eddie’s friends in the Losers Club mean everything to him, and he doesn’t want to lose any of them. He had been so worried at the end of the summer last year when they thought Bev was going to move away, until her aunt decided to settle down in Derry instead. And he had been so glad when Mike’s grandfather let him go to school with them, because it meant they got to spend more time together. All the Losers, the whole set. Undivided, and stronger than ever.

But then today happened, and now Eddie finds himself afraid. He saw how the girls at school, many of them from the popular crowd, looked at Richie today, how they giggled at his jokes, how they went out of their way to talk to him. What if they lose Richie to



popularity? The thought of Richie drifting away, of him sitting at another table at lunch, sharing someone else's meal, hanging out with other people, looking past Eddie when their paths crossed... that thought hurts. Deep down Eddie knows Richie would never let that happen, but he still can't stop fearing the possibility.

And, he has to admit to himself, that somehow, Richie has become the most important person in the world to him. How that had happened, he couldn't say. Once, if asked, he would have said Bill was his closest friend. But somehow, without him knowing it, something's changed. Now, whenever something happens, when he has news to tell, when he's bored, when he needs cheering up... Richie is always the first person he thinks of, the first person he wants to talk to. And he thought maybe it's the same with Richie. He always seems to come to Eddie before anyone else. And Eddie doesn't want to lose that.

Not for anything.

\*

They hang out the following day as agreed. As usual, Eddie's mom glares at Richie with disapproval the second she sees him - disapproval that only becomes clearer when she glances at his jacket and boots. But she keeps her dislike to herself and even, after many pleading looks from Eddie, lets him eat dinner with them.

After they've been fed, they retreat up to Eddie's room to read and listen to music in their usual relaxed, comfortable silence. Stretching out on the bed, Eddie grabs the book he's been reading, while Richie flips through a stack of Eddie's comic books.

"Slumber Party Massacre 3's playing at the Aladdin," Richie says. "We should go see it Saturday, with the Losers. We could hang out at the Barrens after."

"I don't want to miss Twin Peaks. It's the season premiere."

"Oh yeah, forgot. Friday, then."

Eddie glances at Richie

"It probably sucks ass."

"Yeah, probably, but sometimes the suckiness of a horror movie is part of the fun." Richie, turning on his side, starts tickling Eddie. "Come on, Eddie Spaghetti! Say yes, Eddie Spaghetti! It'll be fun, Eddie Spaghetti! Promise, Eddie Spaghetti!"

"Okay, fuck, okay!" Eddie laughs, trying to squirm away, slapping at Richie's hands. "Quit it, you jackass!"

Richie stops tickling him and lays there next to Eddie, grinning smugly. Meeting his eyes, as dark as coffee, Eddie feels a little short of breath. Richie is lying so close Eddie can feel the warmth from his body. His skin has a soft, almost golden glow in the dim light from Eddie's desk lamp. Eddie wants to reach out and touch his cheek, trace lines between his freckles with the tip of his finger. He wants to brush away that unruly lock of hair from his forehead, wants to lean over and kiss...

"Oh..."

Richie nudges him with his elbow.

"Now you've given me your word. It'll be fun, Eds. I promise."

"Yeah... sure," Eddie smiles weakly.

Richie pinches his cheek and says "Cute, cute, cute!", then gets up to change the music. As he starts looking through Eddie's music collection, Eddie stares up at the ceiling, heart pounding in his chest, his cheek burning hot where Richie just touched it. Turning his head, he fixes his eyes on his friend, who is examining the track list of one of his mixtapes.

And for the first time, Eddie fully understands what his feelings for Richie has grown into. He fully understand why he's so afraid.

"Oh, fuck."

## 2. The Great Pretender

### Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Friday the 13th! Here's the second chapter, and thanks for reading!

*Oh yes, I'm the great pretender*

*Pretending I'm doing well*

*My need is such I pretend too much*

*I'm lonely but no one can tell*

(Freddie Mercury - The Great Pretender)

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To all of a sudden figure out that your feelings for your best friend are quite different from what you thought they were... that isn't easy. Eddie tries to wrap his head around it, does his best to figure out when this happened, when his heart had changed like this, but he can't.

All he knows that he is completely and utterly head over heels in love with Richie.

Trying to process all of this is making Eddie's head - and his heart - hurt. Maybe part of him knew, deep down. Maybe he was just in denial, and didn't know how to admit it to himself. But it still feels sudden, and it's still a shock.

As if this isn't scary and confusing enough, there is also Richie's sudden rise in popularity, which makes everything worse. The rest of the week keeps going the same way it started, with people noticing Richie and wanting to be noticed by Richie. For Eddie, this is a highly unwelcome disruption.

Except for when they got the urge to be assholes, the other kids at

school rarely used to pay any attention to the Losers Club. And Eddie had been cool with that. He preferred it, to be honest. They had each other, and that was enough. But now there's suddenly an endless stream of "Hi, Richie!", "Come sit with us, Richie!", "Wanna hang out later, Richie?", "You're so funny, Richie!", and Eddie is now constantly trying to deal with the fear he can't quite shake - the fear of losing Richie. He's worried and resentful towards all the girls at school who are trying to intrude on what he has with Richie. Trying to take his place as the person closest to Richie. It seems like it could only be a matter of time before one of them will catch Richie's eye, and then Eddie knows his heart will break.

But for now, although he seems to think all the attention is hilarious, Richie doesn't really encourage it, but looks more interested in sticking by Eddie and the Losers Club, just like always. That does provide Eddie with some comfort, but he doesn't manage to convince himself that it will stay that way.

He's tensing up every time he hears a girl approach Richie, talking to Richie, or talking about Richie. He's walking around in constant worry, wondering what will happen.

How long will Richie be by his side?

\*

"Eddie? Your name's Eddie, right?"

Mary Graham comes up to Eddie on Friday afternoon when he's alone by his locker. He tries to keep a neutral look on his face, though he's instantly suspicious.

"Yes..." he says, voice frosty.

"You're..." she laughs a little, blushing slightly. "You're good friends with Richie Tozier, right?"

"Yes." This time Eddie can practically see icicles forming when he speaks.

"I was wondering... he's not dating Beverly Marsh, is he?"

Eddie shakes his head. With an excited smile, she starts digging through her bag, then pulls out a sealed pastel blue envelope that she's decorated with silver star stickers.

"Then could you give him this? And tell him it's from me?" She smiles pleadingly at him. "Please...?"

Eddie looks from the envelope to her. He looks her over, taking in her appearance. She's pretty. She looks stylish, but not like she's trying to. She looks friendly. Everyone likes her. She's cool. She's nice.

She's a girl.

She's just the type he can see Richie falling for.

Avoiding her eyes, Eddie points out Richie's locker.

"That's Richie's locker over there. Why don't you just put the letter in there yourself? Nothing personal, I'd just rather not be used as an errand boy."

"Oh, right... sorry," she says awkwardly. "You're right. I'll just... slip it inside his locker, then. Thanks anyway."

"Yeah, sure."

Slamming his own locker shut, he hurries down the hall. He hears a female voice call out "Eddie, wait up!", and prepares himself to be even more annoyed, before he realizes that it's Bev and slows down. She catches up to him, smiling.

"Did Mary want to give you a love letter?" she winks.

"For Richie," Eddie says grumpily. Bev laughs.

"Everyone's sure digging his new look! Some of the girls have come up to me, too, asking me to pass on stuff to Richie and wanting to know if I'm his girlfriend."

Eddie gives her a sideways glance.

"Are you?"

Bev slows her steps, staring at Eddie with a frown.

"No... Richie and I aren't dating. What the hell gave you that idea?"

Eddie shrugs.

"Don't know... you seem chummier these days... he asked you to pick out his clothes... and you and Bill seem to have gone back to just friends, so I was just wondering..."

She looks at him searchingly, and Eddie avoids meeting her gaze.

"Yeah, well, things between me and Bill fizzled out pretty quickly. I mean, I care about Bill a lot, but we're better off just being friends. And I guess Richie and I have been hanging out more often lately, but there's absolutely nothing between us. And as for that thing about me picking out his clothes this weekend? All that was just because I happened to be at the thrift store at the same time as him, so he asked for my opinion."

"He... he didn't ask you especially?" Eddie asks.

"No. Anyway, I adore the guy, but I don't have any feelings for him. At all. And he doesn't have feelings for me, either, Eddie, not even remotely."

She puts her hand on his shoulder, halting him.

"Hey..." she says gently. "He doesn't. Trust me."

\*

Eddie doesn't quite know what to make of this conversation. There had been something in her voice that made him wonder if she'd figured out how he feels about Richie and wanted to reassure him. Whatever the reason, Eddie believes she was telling the truth about having no feelings for Richie beyond friendship, but he thought it was still quite possible of Richie feeling something for *her*. And even if he doesn't, he might still fall for one of the girls who are interested in him. And there are plenty of them.

After the school day has ended and the Losers are gathered outside the entrance, Richie tells them about the plan to go to the movies that night. Bill and Stan look at each other. They fidget a bit, then Stan says apologetically:

"Sorry... Bill and I have a project we need to work on. For... history class."

"Aw, man!" Richie groans, disappointed, "Can't you put it off for one night?"

"D-d-definitely not," Bill says decidedly. "W-w-we already put it off, so we n-need to work all w-w-weekend. S-s-sorry."

"Yeah," Stan shrugs. "Can't be helped. You guys go anyway, though, and have fun. Tell us all about the movie on Monday."

"Y-y-yeah, have fun. Anyway, m-me and Stan better g-get going, we have s-s-so much w-work to do. S-s-see you M-monday!"

Bill and Stan wave goodbye, again wish them a fun time at the movies, then head off together in the direction of Bill's house, chatting quietly amongst themselves.

But Ben and Mike are up for going, and Bev too.

"The Slumber Party Massacre movies are all directed and written by women. The first one especially was a really fun satire of slasher horror tropes and the male gaze, written by noted feminist Rita Mae Brown. That is a movie series I want to support, even if the sequels suck," she says decidedly.

Ben asks her more questions about the topic, and after saying goodbye, they start walking down the street together, Bev talking excitedly about women in the film industry, and her own personal favorites, while Ben quietly hangs on her every word. Looking after them, Mike chuckles, then says goodbye too and hurries home to take care of the chores that need to be done before he'll be allowed to go out.

"See you later at the Aladdin, then, Eds? Movie starts at eight, but we'd better be early, I want good seats."

"Okay. Try not to act like a dumbass this time, though. We almost got kicked out last time."

"You lie, I was a perfect angel," Richie says with an mock-offended sniff.

"Yeah, well, so was Lucifer," Eddie snorts, grabbing his bike. He is just about to say "See you later, alligator!" and take off when a voice calling out to Richie makes him pause.

"Richie! Hold up!"

Gretta Keene, of all people, comes running up to them. She gives Eddie a contemptuous look, then smiles at Richie in such a cringeworthy, simpering way that Eddie almost bursts out laughing.

"How may we help you?" Richie asks her, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"I just... I thought I'd as if you felt like exchanging phone numbers? I thought we could talk some time this weekend... maybe make plans to hang out... or whatever." She's batting her eyelashes, eyes fixed on Richie. He stays quiet for a moment, then shrugs, saying:

"Sure, why not?"

Eddie has a hard time believing his ears. He stares at Richie with wide eyes and a gaping mouth.

*"What the fuck, Richie?!"*

Richie takes out pen and paper, to write down his number... no wait, that's not his number, that's... A smile spreads on Eddie's face as he realizes what Richie is doing. Grinning, Richie hands Gretta the note, not with his phone number, but with 'LOSER' written on it in big letters.

"There you go," Richie says cheerfully. "I'd rather not give you my number, so you get this instead. Although that word might be too good for you. Losers can be pretty awesome, you know."

Then he winks at Eddie, mouths the words "that one was for you,



Eds”, and takes off on his bike.

Eddie can't help himself. He bursts out laughing. He laughs so hard his knees get weak and he has to hold onto his bike for support.

”Oh dear, that was unexpected! ” he chuckles, wiping away tears of laughter from the corners of his eyes. Gretta looks up from the note to glare at him, then lunges at him as if to push him down with an outraged yell. Eddie swiftly dodges it, then jumps on his bike and takes off, still laughing all the way home.

### 3. What is Love?

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, I have to confess that I set this fic in 1990 just so I could include a scene of Richie and Eddie watching Twin Peaks together. I couldn't help myself (I suppose I should mention that there's some very mild spoilers for the show in this and next chapter). As always, thanks so much to everyone for reading, leaving me kudos and comments. I really appreciate it.

*And maybe love is letting people be just what they want to be*

*The door always must be left unlocked*

*To love when circumstances may lead someone away from you*

*And not to spend time doubting*

(Howard Jones - What is Love?)

---

"Will you be going out later, sweetie?" Sonia Kaspbrak asks her son over dinner in a falsely casual tone of voice. Eddie looks at her, trying to steadily meet her gaze as he replies.

"Yes, mom. To the movies."

"With the Tozier boy?"

"With Richie, yes. And some of our other friends."

"The Tozier boy's dressing like a hoodlum these days. But then again, he's always acted like one. He's a bad influence on you, Eddie."

Eddie chooses not to reply. She sniffs and absently shuffles food around her plate with her fork.

"You've been studying hard all week, and you know how delicate you are. I think it would be best if you stayed home to rest..."

"Mom," Eddie interrupts. "We've been over this. Having fun with my friends is a form of rest! It helps me unwind. And we're just going to the movies, not running a marathon! And we're not doing anything bad, we're just going to spend some time together, that's all." He sighs. "Mom... it's good for me to get out of the house..."

"You mean get away from me," she says, voice trembling.

Eddie's silent for a few moments.

"Mom... I love you, but I should be able to be away from you for a few hours without having to feel bad about it."

"If you really loved me you wouldn't want to abandon me," she says, eyes dark.

"If you really loved *me*, you wouldn't talk like that!" Eddie says, trying not to burst into tears. His mother gasps, mouthing inaudible words.

"And I'm not abandoning you, I'm just going out with my friends!" He rises from the table. "I *do* love you, mom. And I want you to have a life and be happy. You should want the same for me."

He hesitates.

"Maybe you could call Eleanor. Go out, have some fun."

Eddie leaves the kitchen and grabs his jacket.

"I'm going out now. See you later."

She says nothing, but sits motionless at the table.

\*

Since Eddie left his house early, he decides to go to Richie's house first instead of the Aladdin. His argument with his mom - one of many, recently - is churning inside his head, and suddenly a thought

strikes him and makes him step on the brakes of his bike. He has to sit down for a moment on a nearby bench to collect himself.

*"Am I like her?"*

Is he? Is he just like his mother? He thinks about that cold hard pit he gets in his stomach whenever he sees a girl talking to Richie, or even just looking at him. He thinks about how afraid he's been of Richie leaving him, drifting away from him.

*"Am I like her?"* he thinks again. *"Am I?"*

He shakes his head, a sickly feeling in his gut. No. Never. No matter what happens, he will never allow himself to be like her. And if he can't be with Richie in the way he wants to, then he will be the best friend to Richie he can be. He makes up his mind. When - if - Richie gets a girlfriend, then he will try to be happy for him. It will hurt, but he will do everything in his might to be happy for Richie.

When he arrives at Richie's house, Richie is just stepping outside.

"Eds?"

"I left early, so I thought we'd go together," Eddie explains.

Richie smirks.

"Just couldn't wait to see me, could you?"

"Yeah, seeing your ugly face always makes me feel better about my own," Eddie says, then sighs. "Actually, my mom was..."

"Oh. Say no more. I know all about... difficult parents," Richie says, glancing back at his own house. "Maybe I should pay her a visit? That might cheer her up, some."

Richie's eyes soften when he sees that Eddie is not in the mood for mom jokes. He walks up to Eddie and puts his arm around Eddie's shoulders. "Hey... To hell with them all. We're gonna have fun tonight. Okay, dipshit?"

Eddie smiles faintly.

"Okay, asswipe."

Richie pinches his cheek, a little softer than usual.

"Cute, cute, cute."

Eddie retaliates by pinching Richie's nose.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid."

They get on their bikes, pedaling slowly. After just a few minutes of listening to Richie's dumb chatter, Eddie can feel his mood lift. When they arrive at the Aladdin, they're still early. None of the others have arrived yet. So they buy themselves ice cream and sit on a bench talking until the rest of the Losers, minus Bill and Stan, show up. They buy tickets, as usual slipping the woman in the ticket booth two bucks extra each to be allowed in despite the R-rating, and hurry inside to get decent balcony seats. Mary Graham is inside with some friends, and she starts whispering to them when the Losers Club walk past.

The movie is pretty awful, but Eddie is enjoying himself anyway with Richie whispering to him, pointing out plot holes and making fun of the stupid characters:

"'Oh, *nooo*, we're trapped and can't get out!' It's a *glass* door! Just break it, you fucking morons!"

Sitting there in the dark next to Richie, Eddie makes another decision. He decides to do his best to stop worrying about what's going to happen if Richie meets someone, and just enjoy their time together. He looks at Richie, munching on popcorn and rolling his eyes at the screen, and feels his heart contract with a sort of bittersweet longing.

*"I love you. I may never be able to tell you out loud, but I love you."*

Richie turns to grin at him, motioning towards the screen with a "can you believe this shit?" expression, and holds out his popcorn to Eddie, who takes a handful, and turns to watch the rest of the movie.

After the movie's over, they go to retrieve their bikes to head to the Barrens, when Mary Graham calls out to Richie:

"Hey, Richie, wait!" she comes over, group of friends following her. "My parents are away, so we were going to my house to hang out. Why don't you come with us?"

Richie frowns, then motions towards his own friends.

"No thanks, I have prior engagements."

"Oh..." she blushes. "Your friends can come too."

Mary's friends groan at that. "No way, those dorks..."

"Sorry," Richie says, "but we already have plans. Unless you guys want to go?" he asks, turning to the others.

The Losers shake their heads, saying "Nah", "I'm good."

"Well, there you have it. See you at school, Mary."

"Hey, Tozier," Tom Michaelson steps forward, putting his hand on Richie's shoulder. "Let me talk to you for a second."

They step aside. Tom is talking quietly to Richie, who is listening with an expressionless face, then says something in reply that makes Tom red in the face, gives him a pat on the shoulder, then picks up his bike.

"Okay, guys. Let's go."

Down at the Barrens the Losers Club pull out blankets from their backpacks to spread out at their favorite spot, a little lantern that runs on batteries, and a small cassette player. They put all their leftover movie theater candy in the middle, and eagerly begin discussing the flick.

"That was really... bad," Ben laughs.

"Fuck yeah, it was the worst!" Richie agrees. "I thought I was gonna die laughing!"

"It was better than part two, though," Eddie says, munching on a piece chocolate. "Part two was so damn bizarre, I still don't know what it was about."

"No way, part two was *much* better," Bev says, and everyone starts arguing on which sequel sucked more, though everyone agrees the first movie was pretty fun. Then suddenly Mike interrupts the discussion to grin at Richie:

"So... you're getting pretty popular these days, Richie."

"Yeah, it's really fucking hilarious, actually. And weird," Richie chuckles.

"I say there's probably witchcraft involved," Eddie smirks. "Like in Teen Witch."

Bev bursts out laughing.

"Oh, is that it?" she asks Richie. "A popularity spell?"

Richie snorts.

"If I had magic powers, I would rather use them to give every fucking jock some major dick shrinkage, or to get out of detention, shit like that. Plus, that damn Louise let popularity go to her head and ditched her loyal friend in favor of a bunch of ass kissing sycophants. I wouldn't want to follow her example. I don't need phony friends, I have you guys," he says.

"Aww!" Bev says. Richie smiles warmly at them all.

"Top that," he says, winking.

"So, what did Tom Michaelson say to you?" Ben asks.

"That asshole..." Richie rolls his eyes. "He told me I could get 'better' friends if I just stopped hanging out with a bunch of weirdo dorks."

"I've been called worse," Eddie shrugs.

"What did you say?" Mike wonders. "He looked pretty pissed."

"Told him the unlike certain fucktards who shall remain nameless those 'weirdo dorks' never stood by and watched - and laughed - when Henry Bowers used to shove my head in the toilet, so I'd rather stick with them." Richie chuckles. "Just wait and see, because of that one, my popularity will probably have come to a sudden stop on Monday."

"Not so sure about that," Mike smiles. "A lot of the girls are really into you. Like anyone of them in particular?"

Richie frowns.

"Not really. And I don't think they actually like me, either. Before, when I had my glasses, none of them looked twice at me, and now they're all over me. Feels fake."

"I don't know about that," Bev says, glancing at Ben. "Sometimes you can know someone for a while, and then, just like that, something happens to make you realize you actually like that person. It's quite possible at least some of them like you for real. You're not *that* bad, you know," she teases.

"My dear Beverly, you are far too kind," he winks at her, then leans closer to Eddie. "Do you think there's something going on there?" he whispers with a nod to Bev and Ben. They are sitting close, giving each other little smiles, and Ben is picking out pieces of candy he knows Bev likes and handing them to her.

"Maybe," Eddie whispers back, glancing at the pair. "She said there was nothing between her and Bill anymore."

"Huh."

Ben looks up, notices that they're being observed, and blushes a little. Bev just smiles.

"So anyway, Mike," she says, wiggling her eyebrows. "What's up with you and Monica Wong?"

"What's all this, then?" Richie perks up. "What have I missed?"

"Oh, our friend Michael was seen having what looked like a very



intimate conversation with the lovely girl in question.”

”Okay, Mike, spill! Enquiring minds want to know,” Eddie asks.

Mike fidgets, looking down at his hands.

”It wasn’t an *intimate* conversation, we were studying. We’re paired up for biology class.”

”But you like her?”

”I don’t know... maybe...” he smiles. ”I think so.”

”Are you going to ask her out?” Ben asks.

”I don’t know... I’m not sure she likes me back.”

”Oh, she does, definitely. Ask her out, Mike,” Bev says decidedly.

”Trust me, you have nothing to worry about.”

”Yeah, go for it, Mike!” Richie says, reaching over to slap Mike on the back. ”Monica Wong is among the minority of non-assholes at school, you should definitely ask her out.”

”I guess... I’ll give it a try,” Mike smiles.

”Yeeeeeeaaaah!!! Mike! Mike! Mike!” Richie yells pumping his fists in the air.

”Beep beep, Richie,” Mike says quietly, smiling shyly and taking some candy.

\*

The cold weather soon makes them pack up their things and head home. As they often do, Eddie and Richie ride their bikes slowly on their way home, chatting casually.

”Want to watch the Twin Peaks season premiere with me tomorrow?” Eddie asks Richie.

”Fuck yeah,” he says. ”Agent Cooper was fucking shot last episode, I need to know he’s okay!”

"He's the main character, dumbass! Of course he'll be okay."

"Don't pretend you're not worried," Richie scoffs. "You were practically in hysterics after that last episode."

"So were you!" Eddie says indignantly.

"Yeah, so, we'll watch it together tomorrow, then. My house? I think my parents will be out."

Eddie hesitates, wondering how his mother will react if he goes out two nights in a row. Then he thinks how it isn't normal that he should have to worry about that and makes up his mind.

"Yeah, sure. Let's make it your house."

"You're going to be okay? With your mom, I mean?" Richie asks before he and Eddie part ways.

"Yeah, I think so. Eventually. Some day."

Richie grins at him.

"If things are bad, I'll always be there, Eds. Remember that."

"I know," Eddie says, smiling softly, feeling a slight prickle in the corner of his eye. "Me too."

He watches Richie riding his bike down the street until he disappears from view, then hurries home.

## 4. Take on Me

### Notes for the Chapter:

As always, thanks for reading! Hope you enjoy!

*So needless to say*

*I'm odds and ends*

*I'll be stumbling away*

*Slowly learning that life is okay*

*Say after me*

*It's no better to be safe than sorry*

(a-ha - Take On Me)

---

When Eddie got home that Friday night after the Barrens, his mother was already in bed. The next morning, he's worried about leaving his room and having to face her after their argument, but when he does it seems that she has apparently decided to act like the whole thing never happened. She fixes Eddie his breakfast, talks about the weather and asks the occasional question about his schoolwork. When Eddie mentions going over to Richie's house later to watch TV, she purses her lips but doesn't argue except to ask if Richie's parents will be there.

"I've seen them pile up carton after carton of Camels at the store. I don't want you catching their second hand smoke."

"Richie said he thought they would be going out, mom. And they never smoke inside the house, anyway."

"Hmph."

She takes a sip of her coffee and sighs.

"Try not to stay there too late, sweetie. I've called Eleanor Dunton. We will have dinner and go out for drinks with some acquaintances of hers. I'll most likely be home late. I'll write down the number to the place we will be at, just in case."

Eddie smiles.

"Okay. I hope you have a great time, mom."

She smiles back, but the smile doesn't reach her eyes. Eddie turns his attention back to his breakfast. He finishes the last of his food, and gets up to put the dishes in the sink. He knows enough not get his hopes up that things get better just because of this. Most likely, this is just his mother's way of trying to placate him for the time being, and revert back to her old ways after a while. But even if this is just a temporary truce, Eddie will gladly take what he can get.

It's better than nothing.

\*

When he arrives at Richie's house later that night, he can hear music playing from inside as he walks up the front steps. Richie opens the door for him before he's even rung the bell with an excited, goofy grin on his face.

"Eddie Spaghetti, just in time! The folks are out, and we have the whole place to ourselves."

Eddie smells popcorn as he steps inside, and looking towards the living room he can see that Richie has set a bowl out on the table along with some soda cans. Eddie can't help thinking that it almost feels like a casual date. He looks towards Richie, dancing around and singing along to a-ha's Take On Me, trying to hit the high notes and failing miserably.

"Come on, Eds! Shake your moneymaker!"

"*Hell* no."

"Aw, come on! Indulge me, I'm in a fucking awesome mood!"

"What are you so happy about?"

"Nothing in particular, just that it's Saturday, the house is parent free and you and I've got a lazy night of TV-watching ahead of us. What's not to love about this scenario?"

And as he keeps dancing in his silly, exaggerated way, Eddie feels a burst of affection so strong that he has to look away, and goes to sit down on the couch.

*"Just for tonight, can't I just pretend we're... together? That's okay, isn't it? Just for tonight."*

Richie checks his watch, hurries to turn the music off, the plops down on the couch next to Eddie.

"Alright, the show starts in about five minutes. Fuck, I've been looking forward to this." He turns the TV on, then grabs a handful of popcorn. "So..." he says, "which town do you think is weirder: Twin Peaks or Derry?"

Eddie laughs, opening a can of Coke.

"Not sure. What do you think?"

Richie chews his popcorn thoughtfully.

"We got them beat, no question. Derry is way weirder. One girl gets killed there, and the FBI shows up in like five minutes, and everyone's working their asses off, doing everything they possibly can to solve it. Here, a whole bunch of kids go missing - and get *eaten* - and no one does jack shit about it."

"Hey..." Eddie says softly. "We did something about it."

"Yeah," Richie says bitterly, "but we shouldn't have had to. It wasn't our job. That was the job of grownups."

"Maybe. But we did it anyway, and better us than no one. And we won." Eddie smiles at Richie. "We're fucking heroes, Richie."

Richie gives Eddie a warm smile.

"Yeah. You're goddamn right, Eddie Spaghetti."

"Stop calling me Eddie Spaghetti, you jerk."

And then the Twin Peaks intro music starts playing, and they fix their attention on the TV-screen. Both boys tense up in worry when they see an injured Agent Cooper lying bleeding on the floor of his hotel room.

"Please be okay, please be okay, please be okay..." Richie mutters under his breath.

"I've told you, they're not gonna let their main character die, stupid," Eddie says, he himself wide eyed and nervously clutching a pillow.

As expected, the episode quickly turns... very strange.

"Giants, now?!" Eddie says in disbelief.

"Yeah!" Richie agrees. "What the fuck was that?"

Then Agent Cooper is saved, and both boys breathe a sigh of relief as he is taken to the hospital and patched up.

It's an extra long episode, and it's a good one. Eddie and Richie stare open mouthed as the characters have weird visions, go into comas, get kidnapped and have their hair turned white.

"Well," Eddie says weakly when the episode is over. "That was... wild."

"You're telling me," Richie says, taking a huge gulp from his soda. "This fucking show... so goddamn weird, but I love it."

"Me, too. So, who do you figure the killer is?"

Richie mulls the question over for a moment.

"Don't know," he says. "Ben, maybe? That dude is so fuckin' sleazy. Although he might be too obvious as a suspect. No one would be

surprised. Who do you think?"

"Not sure either," Eddie muses, "but I'm leaning towards James. I don't think that guy is as innocent as he seems."

"Yeah, maybe. Hey, what if we never find out who the killer is? What if they keep dragging the mystery out forever?"

Eddie shrugs.

"It's possible, I guess. The mystery is what drives the story, after all. But anyway, as long as the show's this good, I'm gonna keep watching."

"Yeah, definitely."

Eddie relaxes back into the couch, turning his head to look at Richie.

"So, you really think the popular kids are gonna start shunning you again on Monday?"

"After reminding Tom Michaelson of his assholery? No question about it."

"That was pretty good, though," Eddie chuckles. "I wish Bill and Stan had been there to see it, especially Bill. Tom always makes fun of his stutter."

"Yeah, but when people skip out on going to the movies in order to stay home and study like a couple of nerds, it's inevitable that they'll miss out on glorious, awesome moments of dickbags being taken down a peg by yours truly."

"Okay, take it easy, there, champ," Eddie says, rolling his eyes. "It was good, but hardly Rocky Balboa versus Ivan Drago..." Eddie says, quickly adding: "...and DON'T do your Rocky voice, it's awful!"

"Okay, den I vill do Drrago voice, instead."

"That's even worse than your Rocky voice!"

"Well, I guess it may need a little work, but it's not *that* bad," acting

offended.

"Okay, if you say so," Eddie says with an amused snort.

"Alright, that's it!" Richie gets up and strides towards his bedroom. "We're watching Rocky IV, right now! And then we're watching Beverly Hills Cop, I need to work on my Axel Foley-laugh as well."

"Oh, by all means, let's watch 'em. At least your voices couldn't get any worse. But after that we're watching The Legend of Billie Jean!"

"Uuuugh!" Richie groans dramatically. "Not again... alright, fine. We'll watch it if we have time... but there won't be."

They settle in to watch the movies, and Richie practices his voices as they watch. Eddie is pleased to see he actually manages to improve on them a little. Eddie smiles as he sees how hard Richie concentrates, and how seriously he tries to perfect the different voices.

*"I'm really glad I have you in my life, Richie Tozier,"* he thinks to himself, and slowly lets his eyes drift shut.

When he opens them again, it's an hour or so later, and the closing credits of Beverly Hills Cop are playing on the TV.

"Oh shit, I'm sorry," he yawns, letting his sleepy eyes focus on Richie. "I guess I fell asleep."

"Forget about it. I would have woken you up, but you... looked really peaceful."

Eddie sits up and stretches, yawning again. As his eyes fall on Richie's face, he realizes Richie is staring at him, an odd expression on his face.

"What?"

Richie quickly looks away.

"Oh god..." Eddie puts his hand to his face in a panic. "Did I drool in my sleep?!"



"Uh... yeah!" Richie says. "You kinda looked like a zombie or something. I took polaroids. Gonna use 'em for Halloween decorations."

Eddie runs to look in the hallway mirror. There's not a trace of drool on his face. He turns to Richie with narrowed eyes.

"You're a jackass, you know that?"

Richie nods with a shrug.

"True. I didn't take any polaroids either. A missed opportunity."

Eddie checks the time.

"It's getting late, I guess I should go home."

"Aw, shucks! That means we won't be watching The Legend of Billie Jean tonight, I'm so disappointed," Richie says with a gleeful smirk.

"It's a good movie, and you have no taste!"

"Whatever you say. Be careful on the way home, and I'll see you Monday. And then you'll see, I will be back to being hated and things will go back to normal."

\*

Things were *not* back to normal on Monday. By then, word of what happened with Gretta Keene has been spread around school by some kids who happened to witness the whole thing, and the ones at school who have been targets of Gretta's nastiness all think it was long overdue comeuppance. As a result, Richie's popularity has rather increased.

Not only that, but although people aren't really sure of the details, they have figured out that Eddie had something to do with the Gretta incident, and when the confrontation with Tom Michaelson also gets out, the kids at school realize that Richie must be very protective of his friends. Consequently, everyone in the Losers Club now find themselves recipients of flattery from Richie's admirers who want to make a good impression.

"I don't fucking get it," Richie says at lunch time when he sits down at their usual spot next to Eddie. "I'm starting to think there actually might be witchcraft at play. It's a curse. I've been cursed!"

"Relax," Ben laughs. "At least it's better than being bullied."

"Yeah, I guess," Richie sighs, then nods in greeting as Stan and Bill sit down at the table. "Hey. You nerds missed out on a wonderfully shitty movie last Friday."

"S-s-so we've heard. M-mike told us all ab-bout it," Bill says, nodding at Mike.

"Did you guys finish your project?" Ben asks.

"Huh...? Oh right, the project!" Stan says. "Sorry, didn't hear you very clearly. So noisy in here. Uhm, no, we didn't finish. It still needs more work."

"What the hell was the point of working all weekend if you didn't even finish?" Richie frowns.

"Yeah," Ben agrees. "You could just as well have come to the movies with us."

Bill and Stan both shrug without answering and busy themselves with their lunch.

"Hey..." Bev pokes Mike in the shoulder, nodding towards the entrance. "Monica Wong."

Mike sneaks a glance, then quickly looks away.

"Ask her to sit with us!" Bev encourages him.

Mike shakes his head.

"Nuh-uh. I'm not ready. Besides, she always sits with Cathy and Donna."

"Oh, you like M-monica?" Bill grins.

Mike smiles, nodding.

"In that case, you could invite her to that," Stan says, nodding at posters newly put up in the cafeteria saying 'HALLOWEEN DANCE'."

Bev gasps.

"Stanley, you're a damn genius. That's perfect! See Mike? Now you have plenty of time to work up the nerve to ask her. Although don't wait too long, she might get asked by someone else. And..." she makes a gesture towards everyone at the table, "we will all be there too, so you can feel at ease."

Richie looks up.

"Wait, what? Says who?"

"Says me." Bev narrows her eyes.

Richie sighs, pouting.

"Why the fuck do we have to go out on Halloween? Can't we just watch horror movies all night long like normal Losers?"

"We're going to support Mike, and because it might actually be kind of fun."

"Yeah, but..." Richie glances to one of the popular kids' tables. "What if this was their plan all along? To pull a Carrie on me? They're pretending to like me so that I'll let my guard down, and then... at the dance, when I least expect it..." he slams his palm on the table. "Down comes the pig's blood!"

"Oh, god," Bev rolls her eyes as Bill laughs.

"I don't mind going," Ben says, blushing as he glances at Bev.

"Yeah. I'm up for it." Stan nods.

Richie looks around the table, seeing only decided faces. He looks pleadingly towards Eddie, who pats his arm.

"It could be fun," Eddie says. "If it's not, I promise you we can leave early."

Richie takes a bite out of his apple and sighs.

"Fine. We'll go to the damn Halloween dance."

## 5. Maybe He'll Know

### Notes for the Chapter:

Here's next chapter! Thanks to all of you for sticking with the story this far.

*I got this anxious feeling*

*I got this ache engraved in me like stone*

*Don't take too long*

*Say you'll never leave me*

*Say you'll never go*

(Cyndi Lauper - Maybe He'll Know)

---

"I was watching old episodes of The Addams Family the other day, my aunt has some on tape; anyway, that's when I decided I'd like to go as Morticia," Bev says.

It's a beautiful Saturday at the Barrens. The air is crisp, the sun is shining and there is almost no wind. All the Losers are gathered at their usual spot, discussing the rapidly approaching Halloween dance and their costumes.

"Why not? You'd be great!" Ben says.

Bev gives him a kiss on the cheek.

"Want to be my Gomez?" she says, winking at him.

"Oh..." he hesitates. "I don't really look like Gomez. Maybe Fester?"

"I don't look at all like Morticia, either," Bev smiles. "Of course you should go as whoever you want to, but I think you'd make an

amazing Gomez. He's handsome, a romantic, and he's respectful towards women. Just like you."

"Okay... I guess," Ben blushes, and takes Bev's hand.

"So, Mike," Eddie says "did you ask Monica yet?"

"No... she asked me first, actually," Mike admits. "I said yes, of course."

Everyone high-fives Mike and pats him on the back.

"Alright, Mike!"

"See? I told you she liked you back!" Bev says excitedly. Mike smiles shyly.

"So, mister P-p-popularity," Bill says, turning to Richie. "How many g-girls have a-asked you?"

"Five, but *I'm* going stag," Richie says decidedly. "They're all cute girls, I'll admit, but I'm not really interested. So I'd rather go solo to the dance. How 'bout you?"

"N-nah, I'm... not interested in a-anyone either."

"Me neither," Stan says. "Eddie?"

"Oh, uhm... no, not really," Eddie lies.

"What, you're all going solo?" Mike asks.

"Why not, it's perfect, it's *awesome!*" Richie says. "We'll look like cool single dudes! We can like, sit at a table and discuss important shit like... politics and... the economy, or something. Ideally, we should have cigars, too, but that wouldn't work since we're fourteen, the teacher would bust our asses, and Eddie would probably pass out at the mere sight of one, anyway."

"Probably," Eddie says, calmly. "Those things are disgusting."

"Right. But the point is, we can have fun without dates," Richie says,

"and we will. And if we don't, Eddie promised me we could leave early and watch movies."

And with that statement, the conversation turns back to costumes. Mike wants to go as Michael Jackson.

"Thriller style?" Stan wonders.

"I thought about it, but I decided on Smooth Criminal. Less obvious for Halloween, and a lot classier."

"Cool. Just wait 'til Monica sees you, she'll love it!"

When Bill reveals that both he and Stan are going as Twin Peaks characters - Bill as Agent Cooper and Stan as Sheriff Truman - Richie immediately starts sulking.

"No fair! I was gonna go as Agent Cooper, you sneaky shit!"

"W-well too bad! I c-called it first!" Bill laughs.

"Alright..." Richie sighs. "I'm gonna need a new idea. Eds, help me out, here."

"Well... Myself, I was going for something 50's themed. I have a whole list of suggestions. Here, look."

He pulls out his list from his pocket and hands it to Richie.

"Okay," Richie says, accepting it, "let's see what we've got, here. Roy Orbison... James Dean... Elvis... now, that's a thought. I do a pretty mean Elvis. Listen to this..."

"No!" Eddie says quickly. "If I have to listen to your Elvis voice all night, my head might explode. Here, how about Buddy Holly?"

Richie thinks it over.

"Huh. Buddy Holly... why not? If my boy Eddie Spaghetti thinks it's a good idea, then that's the one."

"Hey, Eddie, why don't you go as James Dean?" Bev suggests. "You'd

look pretty cool.”

”Oh, yeah, that’s actually not a bad idea,” Richie says excitedly. ”Eddie Kaspbrak, rebel without a cause! That’s awesome, you should go for it!”

”Okay, I guess,” Eddie looks away to hide a sudden blush. He and Richie, both going as famous personalities from the 50’s... that’s *almost* like having couple costumes.

\*

Eddie’s costume might be simple, but it still takes him a while to get a red jacket that looks just right. He finally finds one on a Saturday before the week of the dance. Happy that he didn’t have to make do with a less nice alternative, Eddie sits down on a bench with a hot dog and a book to relax in the lovely autumn weather. As he throws his hot dog wrapper in the trash and picks up his book, his eyes drift to a spot down the street, just in front of the arcade. He sees Mary Graham there, holding the leash of what looks like a little golden retriever puppy.

She’s talking to Richie.

Eddie can feel his gut twist up. Mary has her widest, sunniest smile directed at Richie. She’s laughing at something he’s saying. Richie bends down to pet the puppy.

”*Well played*,” Eddie thinks sourly. Richie loves animals. He can hear Richie laughing as the puppy licks at his hands. Richie straightens up, and says something to Mary. He looks happy. Her smile softens, and she places a hand on Richie’s shoulder, slowly leaning in towards him.

Eddie turns away. He’s shaking, and has a lump the size of a tennis ball in his throat.

He needs to leave. Right now.

He hurriedly gathers his things and jumps on his bike, pedaling away with burning eyes as fast as his legs will allow.



He steps on the brakes.

He's outside Bill's house. He's ridden his bike here without even realizing it. He hesitates a moment, then gets off his bike and locks it. He really wants to see a friendly face right now. He walks up the front steps and rings the bell, putting an awkwardly fake smile on when Bill's mom opens the door.

"Oh, hello, Eddie," she says stiffly, looking tired and worn out, like she always does these days.

"Hello, Mrs Denbrough. I was wondering if Bill's home?"

"Oh... yes. He's in his room. Why don't you go on up?"

"Okay. Thank you!"

He heads upstairs to Bill's room. Taking a deep breath, he opens the door.

Bill is not alone. Stan is also there.

They are sitting on next to each other on Bill's bed and they are right in the middle of a kiss. They part when they become aware of Eddie's presence, staring at him with wide, shocked eyes, and Eddie stares back with the exact same expression.

"Sorry," he says weakly. "I forgot to knock... I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to... I'll just go."

Eddie turns in the door, but Bill hurriedly gets up, calling out to him.

"E-e-eddie, wait!"

Bill stops him with a hand on his shoulder before he reaches the stairs.

"P-please stay, w-we n-need to talk about this."

"I'm sorry I didn't knock," Eddie says in a quiet voice as he returns to Bill's room and sits down between them on the bed.

"Forget it, Eddie," Stan says. "What's done is done. It's okay."

Eddie looks up, glancing at both of them. They look nervous.

"I won't tell anyone."

"Th-thanks," Bill says with a sigh. "W-we're s-still n-not sure if we're r-ready t-to..."

"We were going to tell you and the rest of the Losers, when we felt the time was right. And it hasn't yet."

"I get that," Eddie nods. "So... how long have you been together?"

"Oh... Remember that week Richie changed his style? The week before that."

Eddie thinks back to that week.

"There was no history project."

"No," Stan blushes. "We... wanted to be alone."

"N-not *just* for m-making out!" Bill says hurriedly. "W-we had s-stuff t-to talk about, too. S-suddenly r-realizing you're in l-love w-with your f-friend can b-be a little confusing."

Eddie nods and looks down at his hand, taking a shaky breath.

"E-e-eddie? Are you okay?"

And that's when the dam bursts. Eddie cries, sobbing into his hands while the startled Bill and Stan hug him and tries to ask what's wrong. It takes a few minutes for him to be calm enough to talk, but when he is, he tells them everything. That he loves Richie. That he hates all the girls who chase Richie at school. That he's worried of losing Richie to one of them, and that it may have happened now. He tells them what he just saw. And he tells them how afraid he is of becoming like his mother, who's confused love with control.

"I swore to myself I would be happy for him when he found someone!" Eddie says wiping his eyes. "But when they kissed, I... I

felt sick. I knew this would happen, why can't I..." He takes a deep breath, trying to collect himself.

"Okay, Eddie," Stan says, giving his shoulder a little squeeze, "first of all, you're not like your mom. Not even close."

"But I..."

"You got j-jealous. That's n-normal. B-but do you m-man-nipulate Richie, or do you m-make him feel guilty, or anything like that?" Bill asks calmly.

"No..."

"Then you have nothing to worry about," Stan says. "You haven't done anything wrong. You can't help you feel. You're in love, it's normal to be worried about losing that person. Which brings me to the next thing: are you absolutely sure that Richie and Mary kissed?"

"Well, she kissed him, but..."

"Did he kiss back?"

"I..." Eddie looks down at his hands. "I don't know, I couldn't watch. I looked away."

"Well, then you don't know for sure, do you?"

"Y-yeah, Eddie," Bill nods. "I kn-now for a f-fact that Richie has rejected M-mary more than once. H-he told me himself, just the other day. I d-don't think he's interested in her."

"Maybe," Eddie sighs. "Or maybe he didn't *think* he was, until he realized he was. It happens. I would know, wouldn't I? You, too. But even assuming you're right and Richie doesn't care about Mary, it's still only a matter of time before he does fall for her, or any other girl. I...I just... I don't know how to handle this. It's hopeless."

Bill and Stan exchange a look.

"E-eddie... m-maybe it's n-not as h-hopeless as you think."

Eddie stares at him, frowning.

"Yeah," Stan continues. "I've wondered about this before... have you ever thought about how he's always calling you cute? How he's so protective of you? More than anyone?"

Eddie tries to make sense of what they're saying, but can't. He slowly shakes his head.

"H-he cares about you more than an-nything," Bill continues. "You're w-worried that he's g-gonna fall for s-some girl at school, b-but have you e-ever thought that maybe the r-r-reason he never looks twice at a-any of them is b-because he already..."

"No," Eddie interrupts. "That's not possible."

"Eddie..."

"No," he shakes his head. "Please don't say that to me. Don't make me hope, because if you're wrong, then I don't know how I'll ever..."

"Okay, okay," Stan says, patting his shoulder. "Take it easy. I know you're scared, it might be too much for you to think about now. But... try to think about it later, when you feel better and your head's clearer."

"Richie has no feelings for me," Eddie says with a tone of finality in his voice. "I have to go. Thanks for listening," he says, voice softening.

"O-okay. T-take care, E-eddie. Just call if you n-need anything. Anything at all."

"I'll go with you," Stan says, getting up and giving Bill a peck on the lips. "I have to get home, I promised my mom I'd be back by dinnertime."

Stan and Eddie leave Bill's house together, following each other part of the way home.

"I'm sorry again I barged in on you," Eddie says when they part ways. "You obviously didn't want anyone to know yet."

"Hey, we told you, it's fine. Besides, now you've told us your thing, so we're even," Stan grins.

Eddie smiles.

"I guess."

"Look, Eddie," Stan says gently, after a cautious look around. "I know you think you're sure Richie doesn't have feelings for you, but try to think it over again when you feel up to it. Because I was just like you... I thought Bill would never love me back. I thought there was no chance, and then one day, just like that... he kissed me. And I don't think things with you and Richie are hopeless. Just... try to think about it."

Then, with a "see you at school", Stan rides off down the street with a wave.

Eddie does think it over, later that night. He thinks about what Bill and Stan said. He thinks about Bev assuring Eddie that Richie has no feelings for her whatsoever. He thinks about Richie pinching his cheek, calling him cute. But then he thinks about Mary Graham again. Stupid, perfect Mary Graham, and his mind shies away from the glimmer of hope.

*"It's not possible. It's **not** possible."*

## 6. Love My Way

### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter six. Enjoy!

*So swallow all your tears, my love  
And put on your new face  
You can never win or lose  
If you don't run the race  
(The Psychedelic Furs - Love My Way)*

---

Eddie is beside himself with worry about seeing Richie Monday morning. He finds himself terrified of what Richie might say. Will it be 'hey, guys, guess who has a date to the dance after all'? And with the way Eddie's feeling right now, how will he possibly be able to look at Richie without all this fear showing on his face?

*"He'll know. He'll see and he'll know. Everyone will."*

Eddie rides his bike to school a little earlier than usual, grabs his books in a hurry and decides to hide out in the school library where he can relax until it's time for class. He stands in the art section, grabs a book to kill time and starts flipping through the pages, looking at picture of the work of John Everett Millais, but still too much a bundle of nerves to be able to appreciate them.

A trio of girls come in, whispering to each other. One of them points to a table and hurries over. She crouches down, apparently looking for something on the ground, while the other two stand on the other side of Eddie's shelf, still whispering. Eddie doesn't pay them any attention, until he catches Mary's name.

"No... she said she's given up. Because she tried to kiss him and was rejected."

"No way!"

"Way."

Eddie freezes, afraid to move a muscle. He can feel his heart beating heavily inside his chest.

"What happened?"

The third girl holds up an earring with a relieved smile and approaches her friends.

"Apparently..." the first girl continues. "Mary was out walking her new puppy..."

"Oh, my god, have you seen that little cutie? It's the most adorable thing I ever saw!"

"I know. Well anyway, she walked past the arcade to see if Richie would be there, 'cause when he isn't with those lo- with his friends he usually hangs out there. So, he *was* there, and she talked to him and showed him the puppy and let him pet it. And she thought things were looking good, so she tried to kiss him, but then he stopped her."

"Wow."

"Yeah. And not only that, but he got really serious with her and asked her to not do that again, and to stop asking him out, because he's just not interested."

"Fuck. If Mary couldn't catch his interest, then what chance do I have? None!"

"Well, that goes for all of us, honey, because there's more: Mary asked him if there's someone else, and he said there was. He said there's someone he's very much in love with."

"What?! Who?!"

"He wouldn't say."

"Oh my god... You think it could be me?"

"Yeah, maybe."

"Really?"

"Hell no!"

"Bitch!"

All three girls giggle.

"Anyway, that's the situation, and that's why Mary gave up." The first girl continues. "She's going to the dance with Tom, now."

"Hey, we'd better hurry or we're gonna be late."

The girls leave the library. Eddie emerges from behind his shelf, staring after them as the door closes behind them. He stands there for a few moments in stunned silence, then remembers that he needs to leave too and hurries to his classroom. He's a couple of minutes late, but the teacher is not in the room. Richie lights up when he sees Eddie, and waves.

"Where have 'ya been, Eds? I haven't seen you all morning." Richie asks as Eddie sits down in his seat next to him.

"Library. Returned a book," Eddie says, not trusting himself to speak too much. Richie stretches with a yawn, then nudges Eddie's leg with his foot.

"Hey, guess what? The most awesome thing happened."

"What?" Eddie asks in a small voice.

"Old man Richardson ripped his pants in the seat," Richie says with an evil, pleased grin, nodding towards the empty teacher's desk. "It was epic."

Mr Richardson appears a few minutes later wearing borrowed sweatpants, tells them all to shut up in a voice that instantly silences the tittering, and immediately proceeds to lecture them in his regular sleep-inducing way, stopping only to write down a few key words on the board.

"Bueller...? Bueller...?" Richie mumbles under his breath, then



begins doodling in the margins of his notepad.

Eddie lets himself zone out, to think about what he heard in the library. A small part of him wants to hope, wants to believe that the one Richie's in love with is himself. But that small part is soon shouted down by doubt.

*"Maybe it's Bev after all..."* he thinks. That could be it. Bev is with Ben, now, but maybe Richie is suffering under the pain of unrequited love for her just like Eddie does for him. The thought makes Eddie have to fight down the urge to give Richie a look of sympathy.

There could also be the possibility that Richie meant some other girl, but that seems less likely as Richie never has expressed any particular interest in anyone, as far as Eddie can tell. He doesn't quite believe that's it, but he also doesn't dare dismiss the thought entirely.

It is of course also possible that there really is no one at all, and that Richie had simply lied to get Mary to back off. Eddie can only hope that this was the reason for what Richie said.

He doesn't dare hope anything for his own sake.

\*

Word spreads around school that someone has managed to capture Richie Tozier's heart. For the next couple of days, people at school eagerly speculate as to who could be the one, but no one has any ideas that seem very likely. But it has also had the effect of some of Richie's admirers follow Mary's example and decide to move on. He still gets a fair bit of longing looks and anonymous love notes in his locker, but he is no longer surrounded by the usual group of fans in the hallways.

Richie himself is very pleased with this development.

"Thank fuck," he says the day before the dance when the Losers are all having lunch. "Some peace and quiet. And now I don't have to worry about rejecting them anymore. They always look so sad. Makes me feel like a jerk. Yeah, I know it's not my fault," Richie adds when he sees the Losers raise their eyebrows, "but it still sucks having to

hurt someone's feelings." He picks up an apple and takes a loud, crunchy bite. "So yeah, this is a relief. Eventually, I'll be forgotten and one of the jocks or whoever will take my place, and things will be back to normal."

Eddie picks at his food, wishing it could be that simple.

"So, who is this secret love of yours?" Mike asks Richie.

"Oh..." Richie blushes a little and looks down, then arranges his expression in his usual goofy grin.

"Eddie's mom. You all knew that, it's no secret. We're crazy about each other." He winks, but he looks a little awkward.

"So anyways, my Spaghetti-man," Richie says, changing the subject with a poke on his arm. "Got your Jimmy Dean costume all together for tomorrow?"

"Yeah... I'm all set."

"Me, too. Got myself a pretty decent Buddy Holly getup. Proper 50's style suit and tie, and I've found a pair of glasses that look just like his. We're gonna look like legends come to life!" He gives Eddie a wide grin, pinching his cheek. "I can't wait too see how you'll look in costume. You'll be the cutest James Dean anyone ever laid eyes on!"

As Richie releases his cheek, Eddie meets the eyes of Bill and Stan, both giving him meaningful looks. They pull him aside after lunch to an empty stairwell.

"Did you think about what we told you last Saturday?" Stan asks.

"Yes... a little. But I don't know, I still don't think..."

"E-eddie, p-please believe us: It's not as h-hopeless as you th-think. In f-fact, I've w-watched him closely these last c-couple of days, an-nd the more I see, the m-more I think I'm right. I d-don't think your f-feelings are unrequited," Bill says gently. "I th-think h-he does l-love you."

Eddie purses his lips, struggling with wanting to believe in that, and

the desire to protect his heart.

"You could ask him," Stan says cautiously.

Eddie's eyes widen.

"What?" he asks in disbelief.

"You could ask him," Stan repeats.

"No... no way!" He shakes his head, horrified.

"Just hear me out, Eddie. If Bill and I are wrong - and I don't think we are - Richie would never do or say anything to hurt you. He cares about you more than anyone. And... you'll know the truth. And then you won't have to be in all this agony anymore."

Eddie sighs. Asking Richie feels impossibly frightening, but to finally get confirmation... that would be a relief.

"W-we don't want to p-pressure you, and you should d-do what you think is b-best. Just r-remember that you're s-strong E-eddie. You can g-get through this. And r-remember that w-we're here for you."

\*

Later that night, Eddie rifles through his mother's small movie collection. She loves Old Hollywood movies, and has some of her favorites on tape. All About Eve, Gaslight, Casablanca, West Side Story, Scaramouche, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Gilda and... there it is: Rebel Without a Cause. He takes it to the living room to watch. He can only remember seeing bits and pieces of it before.

"You're tearing me apart!" James Dean's character screams at his parents on the screen. This is the scene Eddie remembers most clearly. Now that he thinks about it, he finds it strange that his mother should like a movie about teenage rebellion. He wonders if there was a time in her youth when she too wanted to break free. If so, he wonders if she can even remember the girl she used to be. What had she been like?

The movie resonates with Eddie. He thinks it over as he lies in bed

later, unable to sleep. He thinks about the characters' problems, not so different from his own. He thinks about everything he's been through, and everything he's still going through.

"You're tearing me apart..." he whispers. The words are meant for his mother. They're meant for Derry, for the fucking clown, for Henry Bowers, for the kids at school, even for his own heart. He thinks about what Bill and Stan said before. Maybe he actually should try talking to Richie. His insides twist up in intense fear at the mere thought of having to do it, but at the same time it's also starting to feel like a better alternative than going around hurting and pining like a damn fool. Bill and Stan are definitely right that Richie would never say or do anything to hurt him. And he's already hurting, anyway, so...

So these are his choices: suffer in silence, or speak and have a chance of happiness, however small.

His eyes fall on his costume, laid out on his desk chair. The red jacket, the white t-shirt, the blue jeans and the boots. He pictures himself wearing it, tries to picture Richie in his Buddy Holly outfit. He can see himself and Richie, at the dance with all the Losers, having fun time.

The dance is tomorrow night.

Eddie promises himself just one more night of fun and ease together with Richie. After that, he decides he must try to talk to him. He can have the Halloween dance without having to do anything, but after that, he must try to find a good opportunity to talk to Richie and tell him the truth about his own feelings... and finally learn the truth about Richie's.

Just tomorrow night.

## 7. Halloween

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm getting such amazing response for this fic. Love you all. Hope you enjoy this chapter!

*The night is still*

*And the frost, it bites my face*

*I wear my silence like a mask*

*And murmur like a ghost*

*"Trick or treat"*

*"Trick or treat"*

*The bitter and the sweet*

(Siouxsie and the Banshees - Halloween)

---

Eddie smiles at the mirror. Perfect James Dean hair. He puts up the collar of the red jacket, and steps back to admire his reflection. Not too shabby. Satisfied with his appearance, he leaves his room and goes down to the living room. His mother gets up from the couch with a delighted squeak when she sees him.

"Oh, sweetie! Look at you!" she coos. "Don't you look handsome!"

She rushes to get the camera and makes him pose for pictures.

"You make a *wonderful* James Dean!" she smiles. "Rebel Without a Cause is one of my favorite movies, you know."

"I know, mom."

Her smile widens and he wonders with an inward cringe if she

mistakenly thinks his words mean that was the reason for his costume choice - to please her.

The doorbell rings.

"I'll get that," Eddie says and goes to open the door.

"Trick or treat!" It's Richie, standing there with a smile on his face.

"I thought we were gonna meet up at dance with everybody else..."

Eddie trails off. Richie looks great. He has perfectly captured Buddy Holly's sweetly dorky style. He has even managed to arrange his curls in just the right way, and he has black cat eye style glasses that look very similar to what Buddy Holly had.

Eddie feels all warm just looking at him.

"We were gonna meet up there," Richie explains, "but I wanted to be the first one to see you in you Jimmy threads. You look amazingly cool, Eds. You got the look down, trust me."

He smooths down his suit.

"What do you think? Do I look okay?"

Eddie can't help smiling.

"You look great, Richie."

"I knew it. I look goo-hu-hood!" Richie says, brushing imaginary dust off his sleeves and adjusting his glasses. Then his eyes fall on Eddie's mom, and he grins.

"Happy Halloween, Mrs K! Buddy Holly this year. Looks pretty spiffy, right?" He winks at her.

Sonia purses her lips. Eddie can see she's torn between her ingrained dislike for Richie and approval of his costume choice. Richie doesn't open his mouth to say anything else obnoxious, so the latter wins out and she grudgingly asks him to stand next to Eddie so she can take a few pictures. They pose and she snaps off a few, and then the boys

leave for the dance. They ride their bikes slowly towards the school, weaving between groups of trick or treaters, rows of jack o' lanterns lighting their path.

The rest of the Losers Club are waiting outside the school gymnasium. Bev looks beautiful as Morticia, dressed in the trademark black dress, and she has found a good black wig for the proper look. Her freckles are hidden behind a layer of pale makeup, and her lips are a deep red. Ben, standing next to her, makes a suave looking Gomez in a black pinstripe suit, darkened hair and a fake mustache. Mike is also wearing a pinstripe suit - a white one - with a blue shirt for his Michael Jackson outfit, his face half hidden behind his matching hat which he tips up to look at Richie and Eddie with a smile. Mike does look extremely cool. Monica Wong who's standing beside him can't take her eyes off him. She looks great, too, in an Ellen Ripley costume, hair frizzed up and wearing a grey jumpsuit. Eddie is impressed when he notices that she even has what looks like handmade Nostromo patches to complete the look. To the side of her are Bill and Stan. Bill looks sleek in Agent Cooper's black suit, and he's holding a tape recorder in his hand. Stan looks like the perfect Harry in his sheriff's uniform, jacket and hat included.

"D-diane, B-buddy Holly and J-james Dean have now arrived. L-let's get this party started," Bill says into his tape recorder with a grin, and they all go inside together.

As far as the decorations go, Eddie can't help but feeling slightly underwhelmed. It's not like school dances in the movies, where everything looks perfect and magical. Most of the decorations are of the cheaper kind. There are groups of jack o' lanterns along the walls (plastic and on batteries, of course, because of the fire hazard reasons). Rows of styrofoam tombstones are placed in a corner to look like a little graveyard. The model skeleton from the biology classroom has been seated against one of the larger tombstones wearing a pair of sunglasses. Fake spiderwebs and purple and orange streamers have been placed here and there around the room. The thing Eddie likes best are the many large, glittery bats made of felt that have been hung from the ceiling. They really look like they are about to swoop down on the dancing students.

The teachers who are there are all dressed up in costumes, with the

exception of Mr Richardson, whose sense of festivity only goes as far as wearing a pumpkin patterned necktie. He's standing by the snack table, guarding the punch bowl like a hawk to prevent it from being spiked. The guy who works in the record store has been hired to DJ the event, and is playing a pretty decent selection of music.

Richie's group of admirers smile and wave when they see him, but to Eddie's relief they stick with their dates and don't come up to talk. The Losers Club help themselves to some snacks and punch (with Mr Richardson watching them with narrowed eyes, Richie especially), and find a table to sit and talk, making sure to include Monica in the conversation so she won't feel left out. Eddie doesn't know her very well, but he's getting a good impression of her. She has nice, relaxed way about her.

"S-so, I th-think we all did g-good on our c-costumes," Bill says, looking around the table.

"Yeah," Mike agrees, "But I can't believe I forgot to bring my camera! I would definitely want pictures of all of us."

"Don't worry," Monica smiles, digging through her bag. "I brought a camera."

Smiling at her with glowing eyes, Mike gets up to ask a teacher to take pictures of them all together.

"Okay kids, say 'Happy Halloween!'" the math teacher Mrs Carlton says when they're all gathered. She snaps off a few pictures and wish them a nice evening. Monica takes a few pictures of the room and the crowd, then puts the camera away, promising to send them all copies.

"Alright," Bev says as 99 Luftballons starts playing. "This is a dance, and I love this song. Gomez, want to join me on the dance floor?" She holds her hand out to Ben, who blushes, but takes it and stands up.

"Let's go, Tish!" he kisses her hand and they make their way to the dance floor.

"They have the right idea. My feet won't keep still, here," Monica says, looking after them. "What do you say, Mike?"



"I say 'let's dance'", he smiles, and they get up to join the dancers.

The other four boys remain at the table to talk, but not about politics and the economy as Richie had suggested, but about movies, comic books, music, and about which teachers suck the most. Eddie is enjoying himself, but as he from time to time looks towards the dance floor, feet tapping along to the music, he wishes he could dance. With Richie. Glancing at Bill and Stan he thinks they probably want to dance with each other, too, but he knows very well what people at school think about boys who dance without a girl. And he knows what treatment they are likely to get.

They keep sitting at their table, talking and stuffing themselves with snacks, until Bev and Monica return to pull them up on the dance floor.

"Come on!" they yell, laughing. "We want to dance with all you guys!"

Soon, all the Losers are dancing in together in a group, laughing and singing along to the music. Eddie loves it. It's the next best thing to dancing just with Richie.

The night is quite a success. One highlight turns out to be when the DJ starts playing Thriller. Monica, who has found out that Mike has been learning how to moonwalk, as well as some other Michael Jackson dance moves, makes everyone clear a space for him so he can dance while they cheer and clap. And then, amazingly, the art teacher Mrs Sorenson kicks off her shoes and joins Mike in a pretty epic dance battle to see who has the best Jackson moves. Mike wins, but just barely.

"You know what, Eds?" Richie says as they're sitting down to catch their breath. "Coming to this stupid dance was actually not a bad idea."

"Yeah," Eddie says as he looks around at all his friends, laughing, dancing and having fun. He's having a wonderful time. But he's getting warm and needs some fresh air. He gets up, and Richie decides to join him, so they grab their mugs of punch and go outside to sit down at a spot in the back of the school that's usually empty.

Once upon a time they used to hide out from the Bowers gang there, but now they just go there for peace and quiet. The air is crisp and cool, and Eddie smiles to himself, looking up at the clear night sky, listening to the sounds of music and laughter coming from the gymnasium. He glances at Richie, sitting next to him, humming softly along to Monster Mash.

Richie turns to meet Eddie's eyes with a warm smile. Suddenly it occurs to Eddie that this could be the right moment.

*"I don't need to wait. I could tell him now. I could."*

Yes. Why not? They're alone and he feels relaxed and brave enough to do it. He better just get it over with, before he loses his nerve.

He takes a deep breath.

"I'm in love with you."

"I'm in love with you."

Eddie stares, mouth gaping at Richie, who spoke at almost exactly the same time. Richie's staring back at him with wide eyes.

"What?"

"What?"

Again, they speak almost at exactly the same time. Eddie takes another deep breath.

"Repeat what you just said," he asks Richie.

"You repeat what you just said," Richie says with a shaky voice.

"I asked you first."

"Fuck... okay." Richie drains his cup, then clears his throat. "I said... I'm in love with you."

Eddie smiles with trembling lips, an intense sense of joy bubbling inside his stomach.

"Now you," Richie says.

"I also said... I'm in love with you," Eddie replies.

"Fuck..." Richie whispers.

Eddie reaches out to him, and they throw their arms around each other, holding on to each other tightly. Richie laughs happily, and Eddie just silently buries his face in the crook of Richie's neck, wondering how he'll ever be able to let go of him.

They do let go, though, eventually. Richie sniffs, taking Eddie's hand.

"I'm really fucking happy right now, Eds," he says, looking at Eddie with shiny eyes. He takes off his Buddy Holly glasses to rub at them. "I didn't think you'd ever..." he trails off.

"Me neither," Eddie says, reaching out to cup Richie's cheek with his hand. "I was wrong. We both were."

Eddie leans closer to Richie, slowly. Just before their lips meet, he pauses for just a second, and then they kiss. It's soft and warm, just like Eddie always imagined it. It's also a little hesitant, until they figure out how it works, and then Eddie starts melting from the toes and up, and he lets his eyes drift shut. They are holding each other so closely he can feel the beating of Richie's heart, and he thinks vaguely that Richie must feel his too. They part to catch their breath, and Eddie meets Richie's eyes.

"So, this is it?" he asks. "You're... my boyfriend now?"

"Yeah... I *am*!" Richie says, and Eddie notes that there's no small amount of pride in his voice. "I'm your boyfriend, Eddie!"

Richie's smile is so adorable, and Eddie laughs and gives him a peck on his cheek, happily thinking that he's allowed to do that now because they're *boyfriends*, and then he feels Richie's hand on the back of his neck, pulling him in, and then they're back to kissing each other, and they don't part for a long time.

## 8. The Power of Love

### Notes for the Chapter:

I really hope that last chapter was worth waiting for!  
Big night for the boys. We pick up where we left off.  
Enjoy! Thanks again for reading!

*Feels like fire*

*I'm so in love with you*

*Dreams are like angels*

*They keep bad at bay, bad at bay*

*Love is the light*

*Scaring darkness away*

(Frankie Goes To Hollywood - The Power of Love)

---

"The others are gonna wonder where we went," Eddie remembers in between kisses. "Maybe we should get back, he says reluctantly.

Richie pulls back to look at him.

"Just a little longer," he says pleadingly. "We can make up an excuse, I just... I just want to sit here a little longer. Just the two of us. I mean..."

Richie gets up and holds out his hand to Eddie. "We're at a dance. After what just happened between us, we should have at least one slow dance together, don't you think?"

Eddie smiles. He can hear the sounds of The Power of Love by Frankie Goes To Hollywood coming from the gymnasium. Taking Richie's hand, he gets up, and they put their arms around each other,

slowly swaying to the music in silence. Even when the song is over, they don't want to let go of each other. Leaving their private little hiding place to go back where the others are feels almost impossible at the moment.

"I can't believe this is happening," Eddie murmurs happily into Richie's neck.

"Me neither," Richie says. "I've been so worried and uncertain. I didn't think you liked me in this way. I... I wasn't going to say anything. But then... I changed my mind last night."

"How come?"

"I was talking to Bill on the phone. I was all frustrated, so I ended up blurting it all out. Anyway, he encouraged me to talk to you. He said some things that gave me hope that maybe there was a chance... So, I decided to speak to you about it when the time was right."

"Oh... you talked to Bill, did you?" Eddie smiles.

"Yeah... and now I've got a big fat 'told you so' coming," Richie says, kissing Eddie's cheek.

"Yeah, no kidding," Eddie laughs.

"No way..." Richie pulls back to look at Eddie. "You talked to Bill, too?"

Eddie nods.

"And Stan. I'll tell you about it later."

"Ahem."

Speaking of the devil... Eddie and Richie turn their heads to see Bill and Stan standing there with smug grins on their faces. Eddie and Richie both blush, suddenly becoming very interested in their shoes.

"We thought you'd be here. You missed when they handed out prizes for best costumes," Stan says, smirking.

"Yeah?" Richie clears his throat. "Did any of us win anything?"

"M-mike came in second," Bill smiles. "S-some jock dressed like Snake P-plissken came third, and S-sally C-curtis came first as M-marie Antoinette."

"Oh.."

Eddie and Richie stand there like kids caught doing mischief by their parents, not knowing what to say and still blushing furiously.

Stan snorts in amusement.

"So listen, if you two need some alone time, we can tell the others you got bored and went home."

"Okay," Eddie says, glancing up to meet their eyes.

"Thanks," Richie says in a small voice.

"N-no problem," Bill grins.

"Anytime," Stan says, taking Bill's hand. "We're very happy for you."

They turn and start walking back towards the gymnasium. Before they turn the corner they look back at Eddie and Richie.

"Oh, and b-by the way..." Bill says.

"...we told you so," Stan laughs.

Then they disappear behind the corner, the sound of their giggling fading away.

"Wait a second..." Richie turns to look at Eddie. "Are they together?"

\*

Eddie and Richie remain in their secret little spot for the rest of the night, sometimes dancing, sometimes kissing, or just sitting with their arms around each other, talking softly. Eddie tells Richie everything about when he realized he was in love, how jealous he's been, that day he barged in on Bill and Stan, and how worried he's been that he

might become just like his mother. Richie's arm tightens around Eddie at that last part, and he kisses Eddie and tells him he doesn't have anything to worry about, because he's nothing like his mother.

"If I ever become like her... you should just leave me," Eddie says, leaning his head on Richie's shoulder.

"Then I'll *never* leave you, because I know you. You don't have it in you."

Eddie looks up to meet Richie's eyes. He believes him.

"*Never. I won't ever be like that,*" he swears silently. And this time, he believes in himself.

After that, it's Richie's turn to talk. He tells Eddie that he believes he's gradually built up feelings for him for years now, but that he didn't really dare admit it to himself until that night they watched the Twin Peaks premiere together.

"I saw you sleeping. You looked so cute, and... I could finally admit it. I don't know what took me so long," he sighs. "I guess I was scared."

"Me too," Eddie says quietly.

"I've been scared this whole time. After I admitted it to myself, too," Richie says. "I never thought you would feel anything for me. To be honest... I kinda thought you had a crush on Bill."

Eddie thinks back to before, when he was closer to Bill than Richie. Back then it was probably true - he *did* have a little crush on Bill back then. But that was a long time ago, and those feelings were never even close to how he feels for Richie.

"Well... clearly I don't," Eddie smiles at Richie.

"Yeah, clearly. I'm a moron," Richie says.

"We're both morons," Eddie laughs. "I've been suspecting you of having feelings for Bev, Mary Graham and like half the girls at school."

Richie snorts, then looks at Eddie with glowing eyes.

"Hey... I'm sorry you were so sad and upset. I should have told you sooner."

"Forget it. I'm sorry, too. And all that's over and done with, now."

They kiss again, softly, for some time until Eddie pulls back, listening.

"It's really quiet. Is the dance over?"

Richie listens, too.

"It must be, I can't hear anything."

They sneak back towards the gymnasium. It's closed, the whole school is dark, and everyone's gone.

"Wow. The whole thing ended and we didn't even notice."

"Yeah. I guess we'd better get home," Eddie says. "My mom's probably worried."

"Knowing your mom, then I say yeah, probably. You can tell her it's my fault you're late. She loves me, she'll let it go."

"Well," Eddie smirked. "It kinda is your fault, a little bit."

They take their time on the way home, anyway, unwilling to let their night end. They talk quietly along the way. Now that they're officially a couple, Eddie requests a date.

"Absolutely!" Richie says with enthusiasm. "Anything for my Eds! What did you have in mind? Anything you want."

Eddie thinks about the options, considers going out to eat or catch a movie, but it occurs to him that what he wants more than anything is to be alone with Richie, and suggests just a quiet movie night.

"Cool! You know what, I think my parents will be out again tomorrow night. We could order pizza, listen to music... for you, I'll



even watch The Legend of Billie Jean again,” Richie says with a wink at Eddie, who giggles.

They arrive outside Eddie’s house, and after a careful look around to make sure they’re alone, they share one more slow, tender kiss.

”My first kiss goodnight,” Eddie says with soft smile. Richie squeaks and looks at Eddie with adoring eyes.

”What the fuck am I going to do with you, you’re just so cute,” he says, pinching Eddie’s cheek. ”Cute, cute, cute.”

Eddie pinches Richie’s nose.

”Boyfriend, boyfriend, boyfriend.”

Richie squeaks again.

”Hey, Eds?” he says, hopping back up on his bike.

”Yeah?”

”This was the best fucking Halloween of all time.”

Eddie watches him ride his bike down the street. By the corner, Richie stops and waves, then disappears from view. Going inside, he finds his mom asleep on the couch, one of her romance paperback novels in her hand. She’s been asleep for some time, and luckily, when Eddie wakes her up she’s too drowsy and disoriented to realize that he’s late getting home. She just yawns and asks him if he’s had a good time before stumbling off to bed. Eddie turns off the lamp by the couch, places a bookmark in the paperback novel and goes to his room to get ready for bed. He’s just turned the light on when he hears the sound of pebbles being thrown at his window.

Richie is back, standing in the street below his window.

”Hey, Eddie!” Richie calls when Eddie opens the window. ”I just wanted to say one more thing!”

”Shh!” Eddie puts his fingers to his lips and mouths ”My mom!”

Richie grins in understanding. He holds up his finger, then points to himself. Then he makes a heart shape with his hands, then points at Eddie. Lastly, he makes a twirling motion with one hand then raises it to his mouth as if eating. Eddie frowns at that, then stifles a laugh as he understands. Spaghetti. 'I love you, Spaghetti'.

Eddie points to himself, makes the heart shape with his hands, points at Richie. Then he points at some trash cans down by the curb, then mimics a yapping mouth with his hand. Richie laughs, sticks out his tongue at Eddie, then blows him a kiss, which Eddie pretends to catch.

*"We're so fucking cheesy,"* Eddie thinks happily to himself as he watches Richie ride his bike down the street for the second time.

Closing the window, Eddie goes to clean up and brushes his teeth. He gets out of his James Dean costume and climbs into his bed with a blissful sigh, but he's just too happy to fall asleep, and lies awake for many hours, replaying the events of the night in his head, over and over.

## 9. Invincible

### Notes for the Chapter:

Oh, dear... Hope this chapter came out okay, important stuff going down here. A million thanks for all the kudos, comments and for reading!

*This shattered dream you cannot justify*

*We're gonna scream until we're satisfied*

*What are we running for?*

*We've got the right to be angry*

(Pat Benatar - Invincible)

---

Eddie is in a deliriously happy daze after what happened at the Halloween dance. He wants nothing more than to remain in this blissful little bubble he's in forever. But as it happens, something happens to disturb it, already on the day after the dance.

Unsurprisingly, it has to do with his mother.

Eddie is in a spectacular mood all day, thinking about the night before and about spending the coming evening with Richie. In the afternoon, he goes out on an errand, which is quickly taken care of, and after that he hurries home to relax before going over to Richie's. As he comes inside the house and goes upstairs, he finds the door to his room ajar. His mother is inside. Standing unobserved in the door, he can see her going through his drawers, and then carefully putting everything back the way it was.

He steps inside the room.

"Mom."

Her eyes become wide when she sees him. She does have the minimal decency to look embarrassed about having been caught snooping red handed, but Eddie can see her already preparing to justify her actions.

*"This is it," Eddie thinks. "It's the final straw."*

He takes a deep breath.

"Why were you looking through my drawers? Do you do this often when I'm not home? Just go through all my stuff, violating my privacy and betraying my trust?"

She sighs.

"Sweetie, I know it must seem bad to you. But I'm your mother and I need to protect you. You're a delicate and sensitive boy. Bad kids may trick you or force you to do bad things, so as a precaution..."

"Oh my god, what were you even expecting to find? Drugs? Guns? Gang colors? What? This is just..."

Eddie closes his eyes for a moment, shaking his head.

"You think you know me, but you don't. I'm not stupid, and I'm not delicate or weak, either! You almost made me believe it, but I know now you're wrong. It's time you realize it too."

Eddie smiles bitterly.

*"You have no idea what I've been through. I fought and survived. I can fight and win against you, too."*

"Do you what I'm afraid of?" he asks her, looking her straight in the eyes. "I'm afraid of becoming just like you. To you, love means control. You act like you own me. Well, you don't own me. I'm not a thing! I have the right to my own life! You say you need to protect me, but the only thing that's hurting me at the moment is you."

She gasps.

"It's those friends of yours," his mother says with teary eyes. "Those

kids. That...that boy especially. They have been a bad influence on you, that's why you're like this. That's why you're saying these things, talking like this to your own mother!"

"No. They're not, mom. You don't even know them. They're good kids. When I'm with them I'm happy, I feel healthy and strong, and I even do better at school! They're great friends, and I love them. It's done me nothing but good to be around them. And *'that boy'*..." Deep breath. "He's the best thing that ever happened to me."

He looks at her, makes sure she understands exactly what he means. Her mouth opens and she lets out a horrified squeak.

"Oh... no. Eddie, no! No! Don't you understand?! This is one of the worst things that could possibly happen! Sweetie, you know that homosexuality is a disease, a horrible disease and it's spreading. This will not happen, I won't... I won't have it. You are not to see him again, or any of those kids. Oh, dear god... what am I going to do? Perhaps we should just move..."

Eddie can feel a strange sort of calm. He fixes his mother in a steady gaze, and speaks in a firm voice.

"Mom. I am not sick. It's not a disease. And we are not moving. We are staying here, and I will not stop seeing my friends or Richie. Because today is when it stops. Today is when *you* will stop treating me the way you've treated me my whole life. I've missed out on so many things because of you. I'll never get it back. But I won't let you do this to me anymore. If you ever try it again - *ever* - then I will stop thinking of you as my mother. I will walk out the door and you will never see me again. Never."

His mom is looking at him with wide, teary eyes, mouth gaping and twitching. She gulps loudly, then gives him a look that seems childishly defiant.

"You're only fourteen. If you try to run away, I'll call the police. You won't get far."

"Oh, I know. I didn't mean now," Eddie says calmly.

She frowns.

"I meant later. When of age and I'm legally an adult and you no longer have any say in what I do," Eddie explains. "If you do anything to try to ruin my happiness now, anything at all... I will be patient. I will wait." Eddie takes a few steps closer, a steely edge to his voice. "And on the day of my eighteenth birthday, I will leave. I will disappear from your life, and you will no longer have a son."

"I'll... I'll find you!" she says in a weak voice. "You're my child, my everything. I'll hire detectives, I'll move heaven and earth! I'll find you."

"Even if you did, I'd go to the court. I'll get a restraining order. You won't be able to come near me. I'm sure I can get plenty of people to testify about how you've treated me. Teachers, doctors... Mr Keene..."

Eddie smiles crookedly. He doesn't really believe that he could get a restraining order based on that, but he can see the threat working. *She* believes he could get one.

"I'd tell the court about your sick relationship with that boy. They'll take my side then," she croaks.

Eddie laughs. She gives him a look like a deer caught in the headlights.

"No, actually... they wouldn't. And do you know why? Because they're gonna look at you and think that *you* made it happen. Isn't that what everyone thinks? That little mama's boys all become gay? Kids at school were saying that to me before I even knew what it meant. So that's what's going to happen. People are going to look at you and say 'that woman babied her son so much she turned him queer'. So I wouldn't tell anybody about that, if I were you. It's definitely going to blow up in your face."

She stares at him in stunned silence.

"So here's what's going to happen from now on, mom," Eddie continues calmly. "You will stop doing things beyond what a normal

parent would do, such as trying to separate me from my friends, telling me I'm sick when I'm not, telling me I'm weak when I'm not. If you can stop doing that, then we will still be mother and son. If you can't, then I will walk out on you the minute I'm eighteen and never again think of you as my mom. I don't like it, but I will do it. Like I said: I can be patient. I can wait." He looks into her eyes. "Do you believe that I'm serious about what I just said?"

Trembling, she averts her gaze, and sits down.

"Mom? Do you believe that I'm serious?" Eddie asks again.

She gives a small nod.

"Good. Then do we have an agreement? Will you do what I asked?"

Another small nod.

"Okay, then. Good." Eddie looks at the clock. It's still early, but he needs to get out of here, right now. "I'm going over to Richie's house, mom. We're gonna watch movies and eat pizza."

"O-okay..." she replies, her voice cracking. "Try not to stay out too late... sweetie."

"I won't. I'll see you later, mom."

Eddie leaves the room and hurries out to get his bike. As he unlocks it, he leans against the side of the house for a few minutes. A thousand different emotions are swirling around inside his mind and he feels tired, so tired. Most of all, however, he feels triumph. Because somehow, he instinctively knows that he won. This was the big one, the one that's going to change everything. She will not be controlling him anymore. She wouldn't dare, and he won't let her.

Riding his bike over to Richie's house, his body feels strangely light. He feels a little sad, but also clean and relieved.

He feels free.

When he rings the doorbell at the Tozier house, Richie opens the door with a happy grin on his face.

"Eds!" he says brightly, "You're very early, but you're also right on time because the folks have already left."

He steps aside to let Eddie in. Eddie comes inside, his legs feeling a bit wobbly.

"Hey, are you okay?" Richie says, a worried frown on his face.

Eddie looks up at him, thinking that he's going burst into tears, but instead he starts laughing. He laughs so hard he doubles over, then he hugs Richie, still laughing.

"What is it?" Richie asks anxiously. "Eddie? Are you okay?"

Eddie stops laughing and pulls back with a deep breath.

"I'm fine. I will be fine, now."

Richie gets Eddie a glass of water. They sit down on the living room couch and Eddie starts telling Richie everything.

"It's so weird. We've fought about worse things she's done or said. But this was simply the last straw."

Richie listens with wide eyes as Eddie describes what happened, what he said to his mother and how she reacted.

"You really told her about us?"

Eddie nods.

"Are you sure you'll be okay? I mean, what if she only folded for the moment, she might try something else later on..."

"No, I don't think so," Eddie says. "I made her believe me. Not in that she's done anything wrong in the way she's treated me, but... I made her believe me when I said I would walk out on her. And I did mean it. She will do anything to avoid that, even start treating me like a person."



Eddie takes a sip of water and smiles warmly at Richie.

"I've won, Richie. I can't explain how I know that for sure, I just do. I can feel it. She can't manipulate me anymore. It's over. I did it."

Richie hugs him.

"I always knew you could do it. You can do anything. You are one badass dude, Eddie Kaspbrak," he murmurs into Eddie's hair, lightly stroking his back. "I'm so proud of you."

"Thanks."

"How are you feeling?"

"I don't know. A little drained. Tired."

"I guess that's to be expected."

"I also feel really good, though," Eddie says thoughtfully. "I feel free, happy. I feel alive."

Eddie pulls back to give Richie a soft kiss.

"I love you," he whispers against the other boy's lips.

"I love you, too," Richie whispers back, looking adoringly at Eddie with his dark eyes.

"Now," Eddie says, smile turning into a teasing grin. "I believe you promised me a nice quiet movie night. I've been looking forward to this all day. And I'm... really fucking hungry. Can we order pizza now?"

"Yessir! We deserve a nice night, I'll get right on it!"

Richie hurries to place a pizza order, making sure to get Eddie's favorite toppings.

"Alright, then," he says when he's hung up. "What movie do you want to start with? I was thinking..."

"The Legend of Billie Jean," Eddie interrupts.

Richie wrinkles his nose.

"Or... I have some newer stuff, we could try..."

"The Legend of Billie Jean," Eddie says firmly. "You said you'd watch it for me."

Richie gives a little sigh.

"I said that, didn't I?" He smiles softly at Eddie. "Okay. We'll watch The Legend of Billie Jean. Again."

## 10. Everyday

*Everyday, it's a-gettin' closer*

*Goin' faster than a rollercoaster*

*Love like yours will surely come my way*

*A-hey, a-hey, hey*

(Buddy Holly - Everyday)

---

Eddie smiles contentedly to himself. What happened between him and his mother earlier seems to have brought out the most caring sides of Richie's personality. All night long he has been pampering and spoiling Eddie.

"You've had a rough day, Eds. You deserve to be waited on a little."

After having their pizza, Richie bundles Eddie up in a blanket, makes him some hot chocolate and even steals his mom's emergency Ben & Jerry's out of the freezer. Dessert finished, they snuggle up together on the couch to watch movies. Richie puts a pillow on his lap and lets Eddie stretch out, head on the the pillow, watching the movie as Richie absently plays with his hair.

Eddie truly feel how different it is to be cared for by Richie like this compared to his mother. Everything his mother ever did was really for her own sake. Richie does these things because he wants Eddie to feel good. Because he wants to do something for Eddie. And it's all done with love and respect.

Richie puts on all of Eddie's favorite feel-good movies. After The Legend of Bilie Jean, they watch Dirty Dancing, The Princess Bride and Labyrinth. Richie even holds back on the jokes about David Bowie's bulge, as he knows they annoy Eddie, though he has to bite his lips to keep quiet.

"Thanks for tonight," Eddie tells him with a kiss when it's time to leave. "It was just what I needed."

"You sure you'll be okay going home?" Richie asks him as the open the door. "I don't trust your mom, Eds."

"Me neither, not in the slightest," Eddie says with a slight laugh. "But really, I think she got the message. And if she didn't... then I'll just do what I said. I'll leave and cut off all contact with her when I'm eighteen. Well, I guess I'll leave this town either way."

"We will leave."

Eddie looks up at Richie.

"You weren't going to go without me, were you?" Richie smiles warmly. "Don't you want to ditch this shitty town together?"

"I'd like that," Eddie says, pulling Richie into a hug.

"I can see it now," Richie says dreamily. "The two of us, bags packed. Getting on a bus, or getting in our own crap car we've saved up to. We'll get out and only look back once: to give it the finger when we pass the 'now leaving Derry' sign."

"Sounds like a plan," Eddie laughs.

"Fuck yeah, it does," Richie says, kissing him again. "Promise?"

"Promise."

"Good. Take care on the way home, and call me if there's any trouble."

"I will. Love you."

"Love you, Eds."

\*

The following days and weeks are among the happiest Eddie can remember ever having. His mother keeps her end of the bargain. He

can see her struggling sometimes, but she manages to reign in her need to control him. Eddie has high hopes that she will be able to let go of that need in time. But no matter what happens, he knows he's not her prisoner anymore.

And then there's Richie, of course. Eddie didn't think he could possibly love him any more than he did before, but Richie seems eager to prove him wrong. Eddie keeps finding little notes in his pocket, in his bag, in his locker. Excerpts from song lyrics, crudely drawn but cute pictures, or little messages like 'Cute, cute, cute! - R.T.'. Sometimes Eddie finds little gifts, too. Candy, mixtapes, a tiny stuffed animal that looks like an arcade prize, a paperback by his favorite author. Eddie feels thoroughly spoiled, and he's loving it.

Equally fun is thinking of notes and little gifts to give Richie in return. Book quotes, some slightly less crudely drawn pictures, 'Stupid, stupid, stupid (and also cute) - E.K.', a pressed red and yellow leaf, a keychain, stickers, band badges and patches, a little silver sword pendant on a leather cord.

Said pendant has made Richie's group of admirers deduce that Richie is now spoken for as they've decided it's clearly a love token, and now even more of them back off. Who Richie's special someone is, that's still a topic of some interest at school, though. Several theories have found their way to Eddie's ears, including a college girl, someone he met while visiting his relatives in Indiana, and - to Eddie's utter amusement and bewilderment - Lita Ford. The only theory Eddie *hasn't* heard is that Richie is seeing a boy. Which he thinks is stupid, but also very much a relief.

Richie comes by his house often, to study or hang out. Whenever his mother lays eyes on Richie, Eddie can see her clenching her hand so hard it turns white, but she makes no objections to him being there and remains civil. Richie, too, has apparently decided not to push her buttons for Eddie's sake, and is more polite to her than usual, keeping all his jokes about her strictly behind her back. And, when his own house is too empty and dreary - or the opposite, filled with people on a drunken binge - Richie quietly sneaks into Eddie's room to stay there for the night, resting peacefully beside his boyfriend. During such times, before they fall asleep, Eddie never forgets to do everything he wanted to that night he realized he loved Richie. He

brushes away unruly locks of hair. He touches his cheek and traces lines between his freckles with the tip of his finger. He leans in and presses a slow, warm kiss on his lips. And then Richie will wrap his arms around Eddie, and they fall asleep in each other's arms.

\*

One day, all the Losers are gathered at their regular table in the cafeteria, along with Monica, who has now fully become one of the group since she and Mike started dating seriously - and since she admitted that the two girls she used to hang out with only wanted to be around her to get her help with their homework. Eddie suspects that Bev is very pleased about not being the only girl in the group anymore, and she and Monica seem to have taken to each other very well.

Since it's Friday, and the weather is unusually fine, they decide to meet up at the Barrens later and spend a few hours there. As they leave the cafeteria, Bill and Stan pull Eddie and Richie aside.

"W-we have decided t-to tell the others about us," Bill explains.

"Yeah," Stan says, "and we wanted to give you two a heads up in case maybe you wanted to join us. If you're not ready we completely understand, we just wanted to let you know it's okay if you want to."

"We'll think about it," Eddie says, a little uncertain. Richie nods.

"How do you feel about it?" Eddie asks Richie later. They are walking together to the Barrens to meet up with the others.

"I don't know... it's sudden. But then again... I can't say I haven't thought about it."

"Me neither," Eddie admits. "And I think... I think it'd be okay to tell them now, along with Bill and Stan. I think I'm ready. But we'll only do it if you want to. I can wait."

Richie looks at Eddie thoughtfully.

"No... I don't need to wait. Let's tell them now."

They arrive at their regular spot at the Barrens. All the others are already gathered, being entertained by Bev and Monica describing how they witnessed the satisfying sight of Gretta Keene getting a big fat load of bird shit on her head outside the school.

"It dripped down her forehead and onto her nose," Bev says with a satisfied smirk as Monica wheezes with laughter.

Bill and Stan meet Eddie and Richie's eyes as they sit down. They smile slightly, nodding in confirmation.

Once Bev and Monica have finished with their tale of highly understandable schadenfreude, Bill clears his throat. He's blushing and looks nervous, but determined, and so does Stan.

"N-now that w-we're all h-h-here... Stan and I have an an-n-nouncement to make."

Stan takes Bill's hand. Bev gasps, whispering 'oh my god' under her breath.

"Bill and I are together," Stan says. His voice is calm and steady, though the hand that's holding on to Bill's trembles ever so slightly. And then the whole group bursts out in exclamations of 'you guys!', 'I'm so happy for you!' and 'that's amazing!'.

Smiling happily, Bill and Stan wave their hands, asking for silence.

"Th-thank you a-all, b-but if you c-could please be q-quiet, we're n-not the only ones w-with something to tell."

Everyone falls silent. Eddie and Richie look at each other.

Eddie takes a deep breath.

"We..." Richie says, taking Eddie's hand.

"...are also together," Eddie fills in, holding Richie's hand in a firm grip.

Again, the group explodes with happy outbursts. Laughing, a little shyly, Richie and Eddie hug each other, and they hug Bill and Stan,

and then Bev throws her arms around them, and suddenly everyone is hugging everyone.

Once the excitement has died down a bit, the Losers congratulate the boys in more quiet, but just as earnest terms.

"This is just the best day ever," Bev says, leaning her head on Ben's shoulder as she smiles at the two couples.

Bill and Stan tell them all how they got together. Stan describes how he's been in love with Bill for a long time, without having any real hope of his feelings being returned, until one day Bill had unexpectedly kissed him. Bill tells how, after his friendly breakup with Bev, he started spending more and more time with Stan.

"I fell *m-madly* in love," Bill says, making Stan blush and start playing with the hem of his shirt.

"I didn't kn-know he f-felt the s-same, but th-that day... the s-sun was shining on his h-hair and his s-smile... I k-kissed him w-without e-even th-thinking about it," Bill says with a loving look at Stan.

Ben asks when this happened, and Stan admits to it being the week before Richie came to school with a makeover.

"There was no history project!" Mike exclaims in sudden realization, and the group laughs in a heartfelt way as Bill and Stan blush.

Next is Eddie and Richie's turn to tell their story. They describe to their friends how they came to fall for each other without knowing it, until Eddie realized it that day after Richie came to school with his new look, and for Richie not until that day of the Twin Peaks season premiere. They talk about how they'd both pined on their own ends for each other, thinking it was hopeless. And then Eddie tells about how he'd accidentally found out about Bill and Stan, and how they ended up encouraging both of them.

"They were so frustrating!" Stan laughs.

"Y-yeah. B-but w-we did our b-best to h-help without b-butting in too much," Bill smiles.



"Yeah, well, we owe you one. You did help," Richie says with a warm smile at the two of them.

"So..." Monica says with a wink. "Then I guess that rumor I heard about Richie and Lita Ford isn't true."

"I heard it was the mayor's daughter," Ben teases, and the whole group laughs.

"They can talk all they fucking want!" Richie says with a proud look Eddie. "No one they could come up with holds a candle to my Eddie Spaghetti."

"You're a dipshit, but I love you," Eddie says fondly, giving Richie a peck on the lips.

Bev laughs lightly.

"You guys are so fucking cheesy," she smiles.

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## EPILOGUE - One Year Later, Halloween 1991.

Eddie looks around the gymnasium. Everything is the same as last year, same cheap decorations, same DJ, and Mr Richardson standing guard by the punch bowl. The only thing that's different is the costumes. His friends in the Losers Club have done very well with theirs again. Ben and Bev are dressed up like Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter. Bill and Stan are dressed as Johnny Utah and Bodhi from Point Break. Mike has dressed up as Screamin' Jay Hawkins. Monica is stunningly dressed as silent film star Anna May Wong.

And finally, Eddie and Richie... It had taken them some time to figure out their costumes, but one night rewatching The Princess Bride, Eddie remarked during Westley's duel with Inigo:

"You know what? If there had been no Buttercup, I bet those two would have made a cute couple."

And then they had looked at each other with a smile and decided. So here they are, Eddie dressed in Westley's black Dread Pirate Roberts outfit, and Richie is dressed as Inigo Montoya (though Eddie had to convince Richie to leave their fake swords at home when Richie started playing around with his so much Eddie feared he would end up poking someone's eye out).

Eddie is very pleased with the result.

It's a fun night, just like last year. The Losers all dance together in a group, laughing and singing. They eat too much snacks, discuss their favorite scary movies, and make plans for a horror movie night the following day.

And just like last year, Richie and Eddie sneak out to that little secret spot behind the school to be alone. It's a little colder and windier than last year though, and they cuddle up close together to keep warm.

"Happy one year anniversary, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie says quietly.

"Happy one year anniversary, Trashmouth," Eddie says, placing a kiss on Richie's cheek. He pulls a wrapped gift out of the bag he brought with him. "Got you a little something."

Eddie grins and pulls out a gift from his own bag.

"So did I."

They excitedly unwrap their presents. Eddie laughs when he sees that his is a vintage Buddy Holly single, "Everyday".

"Awesome!" Richie chuckles when he pulls out his tape of Rebel Without a Cause.

"So you were thinking about it, too, huh?" Eddie says, smiling at him.

"Well, duh. Best night of my life," Richie says with an adoring look at Eddie.

They cuddle up together again, looking up at the moon.

"I can't fucking believe it..." Richie whispers in awe. "It's been a whole year."

"Yeah...one whole year," Eddie muses.

"You're not tired of me, are you?" Richie asks, poking him teasingly on the cheek.

"Never."

"Still love me?"

Eddie laughs lightly.

"Always."

They kiss tenderly for a while, then hurry back to the dance, and arrive just in time to find out they've won a shared third place in best costume.

THE END

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

That's all folks! Thank you all for being so amazing. When I started this I had no idea where I would end up with this, but I'm proud of what I've managed to create. I usually struggle when I try to write anything longer than 2000 words, but I really think I've put together a decent little fic here. Thank you all for reading, for encouraging me and leaving me kudos! It means so much. Now, I will take a short break from writing to rest my head a little, but I will be back. Thanks again! <3